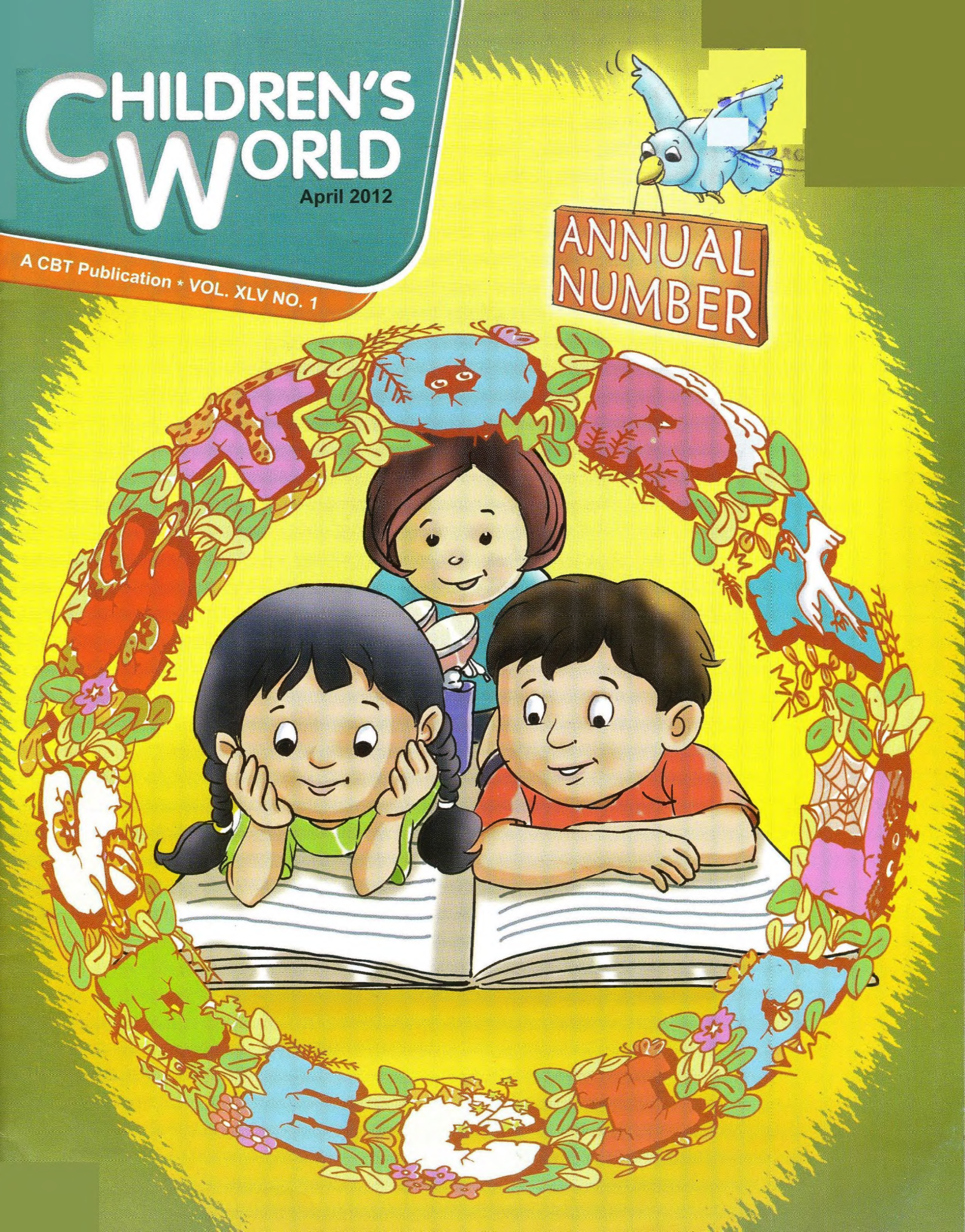
CHILDREN'S WORLD

April 2012

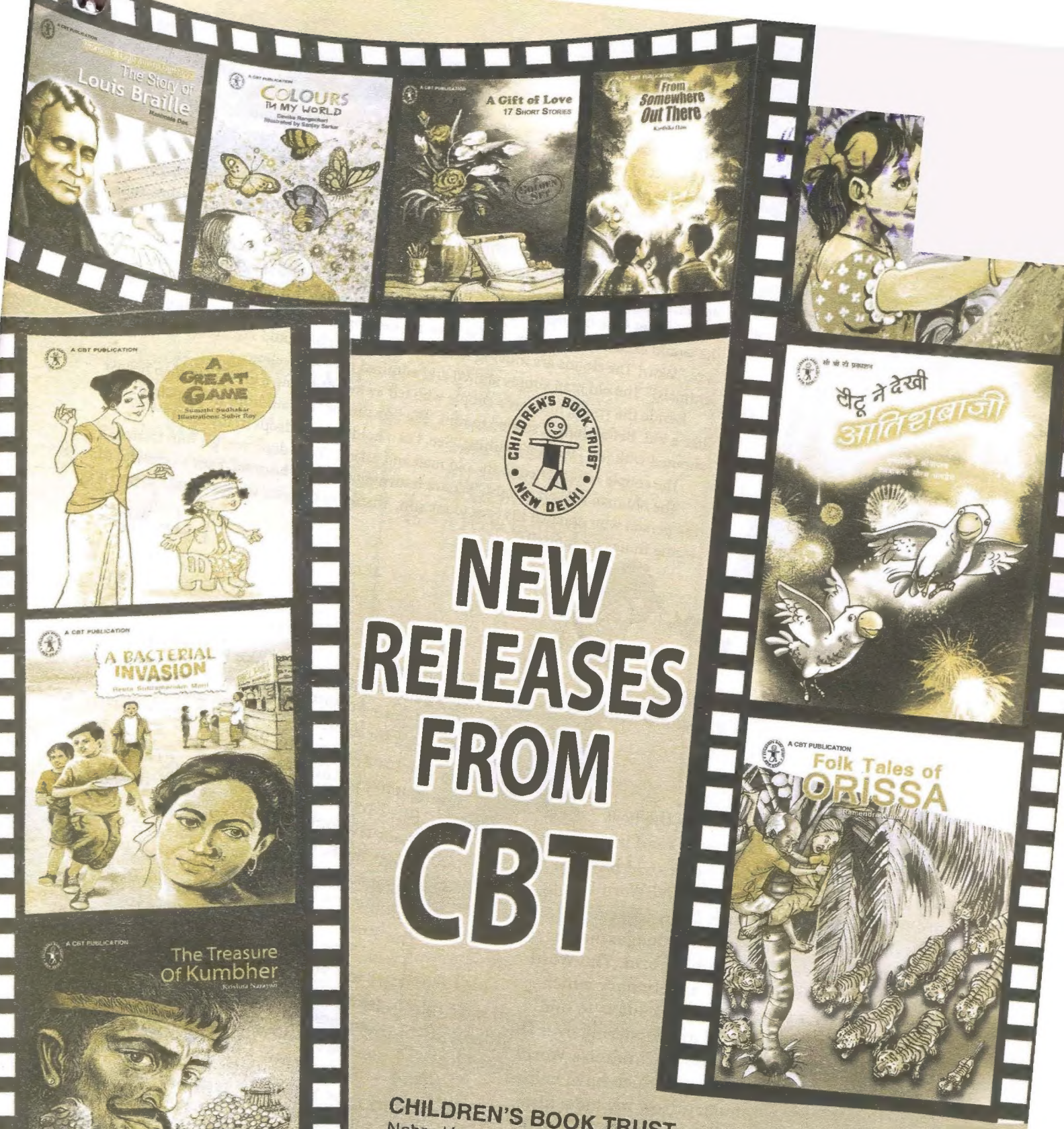
A CBT Publication * VOL. XLV NO. 1



Proud to be an Indian

Simi Shukla (15)
Illustration: Subir Roy

On my way to a distant land
A stranger asked me about my sand,
Filled with enthusiasm I answered,
"I'm an Indian."
He too was happy to meet an Indian citizen,
Having listened to so much about
My country previously
He asked me about Indian values.
Very enthusiastically
Therefore, I explained about
My country to him.
I said, "India is the land of sages,
The land of pure thoughts,
The land of actions, the land of dreams,
The land of ethics, the home of culture,
The milestone of truth,
The mother of legends,
The land of young, the land of old,
The land of Aryabhatta,
The land of the Buddha,
The land of Vivekananda,
The land of Gandhi,
The mother of all civilizations..."
And lastly very proudly I concluded,
"India is the land of its own people."
Fascinated by so many qualities
He asked about the languages spoken
In such a vast land,
I answered, "Love is our language."
He then asked about the religions,
I answered, "Humanity is our religion."
He asked about our God,
I answered, "We believe in the one
Who is the sole creator of this universe."
He then curiously asked me about
The monuments, buildings
And the sacred places,
I said, "They dwell
In the hearts of all Indians."
He asked why India fosters all religions?
I replied, "Because secularism is
The only functional ideology.
Understanding everyone's heart
It nurtures every creature and abandons none.
There is absolutely no discrimination
In her heart.
Under her shelter every bud
Blooms to become a flower,
It rejoices others with its periodic
And lovely showers,
That's why it's the best country
Where I have taken birth."
Listening to such words
The stranger was impressed,
He also expressed his wish to see my land.
I felt elated saying with pride that,
"I am an Indian,
Yes, I am an Indian."



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CHILDREN'S BOOK TRUST
Nehru House
4, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg
New Delhi-110002 (INDIA)
Tel: 23316970–74 Fax: 23721090
e-mail: cbtnd@cbtnd.com, cwmagazine.nd@gmail.com
website: www.childrensbooktrust.com

CBT BOOK SHOPS
Nehru House, 4, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. Ph: 23316970–74
18 B, Rayala Towers, 781, Anna Salai, Chennai-600002. Ph: 30221850
G-14, Kamalalaya Centre, 156 A, Lenin Sarani, Kolkata-700013. Ph: 22155094

Editor
Navin Menon

Assistant Editor
Geeta Menon

Art Executive
Subir Roy

Studio
Saurabh Pandey
Ankur Mitra

Circulation
C.P. Ravindran, Delhi
V. Badrinarayanan, Chennai
K. Narayanan Kutty, Kolkata

Typesetting
Rajesh Kumar Pandey

Founder-Editor
SHANKAR

Dear Friends

The Annual Number, besides bringing with it a bouquet of meaningful stories, fills us with a spirit of optimism. Another publishing year is over, but we have 365 more days of connecting with you—learning from your experiences and getting our views across! This issue hence is dedicated to all our writer friends. Thank you ever so much! It is because of you that Children's World is now 44 years young and getting younger by the day. Your touching tales occupy our thoughts and leave us asking for more. Here is a beautiful one:

An old man was travelling with his son in a train. As the train started, the young man appeared to be full of joy and curiosity. Now and then he would stick his hand out of the window. One minute he would enjoy the wind blowing through his fingers, the next he would exclaim: "Papa, see, all the trees are moving backwards." Then again he would say, "Wow! The clouds are moving with the train." Then he would say, "Look at those animals!" The old man simply smiled and admired his son's feelings.

Beside the young man sat a couple who felt awkward seeing a grown-up man behave like a kid. Before long it started to rain. The boy caught the raindrops in his palms and shouted with joy, "Papa, it's raining! See, I can hold the raindrops in my hand."

The couple now turned to the old man and asked, "Why don't you get him treated?"

The old man replied calmly, "We are returning from the hospital. I am so grateful to the person who donated his eyes to my son. Thanks to him, for the first time, my son is seeing things for himself!"

Navin Menon

two-way talk

This space is for you...for your news and views! The best response wins a prize!

Dear Editor,

Children's World magazine is the best children's magazine I have ever read in my life. It is awesome, amazing, wonderful—I have no words for it. Its stories, poems and Word Hunts are really fantastic. Though I'm a 13-year-old, I'm not willing to read any other magazine for the teens because of Children's World. The Word Hunts inspire me to consult a dictionary which was previously a task for me. Nowadays to find the answer for Word Hunt I am pondering over the pages of a dictionary. Because of Children's World I have learnt a lot of new words which have helped me to improve my vocabulary. Now my mom also reads Children's World because one day I shared the story 'Christmas' which she found fabulous. Thus, I would say:

"Twinkle twinkle little star
Children's World is a superstar!"

R. Seles (13), Salem

Respected Sir,

At the outset I would like to thank you for all your encouragement and support. Thanks for sending a gift and also for publishing my poems in my favourite magazine Children's World.

Sir, I have received the b
of Love through registered parcel. It is a great book, I have finished reading all the stories in that book. Thanks for sending the book because I feel that the stories—'Dr. Thakur', 'The Gift of Love,' 'The Healing Touch,' 'The Invisible Girl' are very well- d are even relevant in my life. I enjoyed reading them, and sir, thanks once again for all your appreciation!

Sir, recently I have written a poem I hope you will like it, If it is published, please send a copy to me.

G. Divya, Bangalore

R. Seles wins a prize for the best response. Congratulations!

CHILDREN'S WORLD
Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002, Telephone: 23316970–74, Fax: 23721090
e-mail: cbtnd@cbtnd.com, cwmagazine.nd@gmail.com, Website: www.childrensbooktrust.com

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CHILDREN'S WORLD
A FRIEND FOREVER
FUN FOREVER

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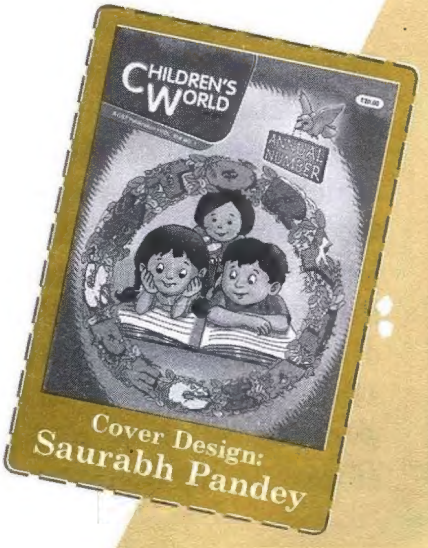


Treasure In Measure

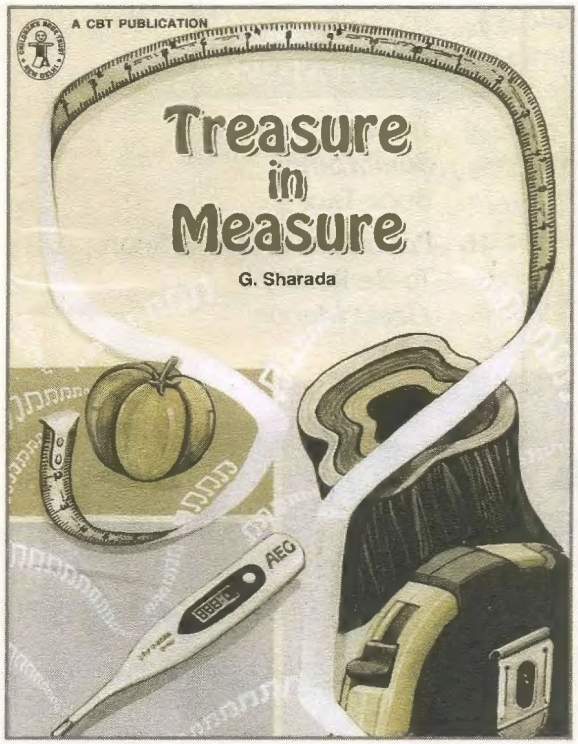
G. Sharada

DID YOU know that the gold ornaments would have evaded their purity and gold content successfully if the unit of carat did not exist? Or that the age of fossils having died many years back can still be known through carbon14 dating or system of half-lives?

All these questions pertain to one single entity—measurement. Our practical needs of daily life require us to measure all the time. Consciously or unconsciously every single person measures things around oneself and is thus also familiar with a variety of quantities in a variety of units. But why do we really need to measure? Why do we not go by the general assessment of things around us? What do we mean by a standard unit of measurement?

The basic questions find a very tangible and convincing answer in the book *Treasure in Measure* which is an interesting, factual and comprehensive journey of a well-defined and systematic form of measurement which slowly and gradually evolved with a group of people determined to make measurement uniform by devising units for various measures, enabling the human race in turn to express itself in various arenas—sports, engineering, health, nutrition, computers, etc. From inception to adoption, the journey was not without its challenges. The inconsistencies and ambiguities, owing to different nations using different units for measurement, led to the standardization of measures. The seven units thus came to form the basis of all measurements.

The book thus strongly advocates that to increase our knowledge and to make our description more accurate, all things that have quantity or number need a specific measurement. The spheres of engineering and science particularly demand facts to be presented with accuracy and the tools that enable us to do the needful are the instruments and the units.



You will be amazed at the simplicity and easy comprehension of the text pertaining to engrossing details relating to the subject.

The book thus brings to the fore a very significant aspect of scientific learning—that it must be supported by facts rather than hearsay. This is the amalgamation of observation and theory which helped Kepler to proclaim the first of the three Kepler's Laws of Planetary Motion.

This journey of numbers and units thus unveils treasured nuggets of information, and hidden in this quantified data are the main attributes of the book that lend it a practical appeal.

With an attractive cover, illustrations that suitably describe the text, box items that provide additional information and catchy sub-headings, together they make the book enjoyable and easy to read.

Sunita Sinha
A CBT Publication

GRANDPA'S HORSE

A.C. Tuli
Illustrations: Subir Roy

WHEN THEIR Grandpa came to live with them for a few days, both Siddharth and Tania noticed that he was clad in a new tweed coat. They had never seen him in that coat before. Obviously it was Grandpa's recent purchase. And in their family the joke that never got stale was that Grandpa was a master in the art of getting things from shopkeepers at very low prices. So, Siddharth and Tania were curious to know how much their Grandpa had paid to buy the new coat. Also, how much the shopkeeper had demanded for it.

"Grandpa, your coat looks gorgeous!" exclaimed Siddharth.

"You must have paid a fortune, Grandpa," added Tania.

That was enough to set the old man off. "Well, children, tell me how much you think I must have paid for it?" he quizzed them.

Making a quick guess Siddharth replied, "Grandpa, I think you must have paid about ₹2,000 for the coat."

"No," replied Grandpa, shaking his head emphatically.

"Then you might have paid ₹2,500 for it," hazarded Tania.

"Both of you are wide off the mark," said Grandpa with a smile. "You will be surprised to know that I bought this coat for only ₹950 though the shopkeeper had demanded ₹1,800 for it."

"What? Only ₹950 for this coat? I can't believe it!" Tania cried incredulously. "Grandpa, getting a coat worth ₹1,800 for just ₹950 is nothing short of a marvel. You certainly deserve to be called a champion bargainer."

The compliment pleased the old man. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he said philosophically, "Haggling is an art, but you have to be a bit of an actor to be successful in it. You must know the limits to which you can go while striking a hard bargain with a shopkeeper, who himself may be no less a mean actor in this line.

"But, Grandpa, you seem to have some magical power of persuading shopkeepers to slash down their prices to the barest minimum," said Siddharth.

The old man had a wistful look on his face as he said, "In fact, I discovered my skill for bargaining when I was very young. I was then nineteen and living with my parents in my ancestral

village, now in Pakistan." Then, leaning back in his chair, Grandpa began in a nostalgic tone.

"I once went to a big cattle fair near our village," said Grandpa. "I did not go with the intention to make any purchase, but just to enjoy myself. It was a bright, sunny day of late November. At the fair, the sight of so many cows, buffaloes, camels, goats, horses, mules and ponies was mind-boggling. Besides, there was a huge crowd of farmers and agricultural labourers, all jostling, pushing and moving about briskly. One could hear constantly a confused babble of human and animal voices while the traders and their customers argued over prices.

"A large number of eatery shops had sprung up overnight all around the arena where the cattle fair was going to be held. After refreshing myself with a glass of lassi and some sweets at a shop, I loitered around leisurely, enjoying the cackle of excited human voices striking hard bargains. There was, however, a big surprise in store for me. Just as I was passing by a horse-dealer he suddenly asked me, 'Need a horse, sir?'

"I turned round to face the shopkeeper. He was a wily-faced, middle-aged man with a ridiculous handlebar moustache. Apparently, he had disposed of his entire stock of horses and ponies earlier in the day, and all that was now left with him was this animal. Suddenly, on an impulse, I decided to have some fun haggling with him over the price of his horse though I had no clear intentions of buying it.

"'How much will you charge for it?' I asked him, casting a disapproving look at the horse.

"'If you had come earlier in the day,' he replied, 'I would have sold you this horse for not less than ₹300. But now that I have almost finished for the day and want to go home as early as possible, I shall give this horse to you for ₹250.'

"I shook my head saying that if I paid him ₹250 for that skinny, half-starved horse, I would become the laughing stock of my family for my whole life. So I turned around to leave.

"'Oh, Sir, listen to me,' said the horse-dealer. When I stopped and faced him again, he said jovially, 'You seem to be in a greater hurry to go home than me.' Then, he said persuasively, 'Come, give me ₹200 and the horse will be yours.'

"I told him I had already wasted enough of my time talking to him. Darting a quick, dismissive look at his horse, I said, 'I would have gladly parted with ₹200 if your horse had been worth it, but it is all skin and bones, as if it had had its last meal a week ago. But since it is your horse, you have the right to put any fancy price of your liking on it.'

"Once again I made a move to leave. But this time the horse-dealer virtually blocked my way and said, 'I know I'll be starving my children by asking you to pay me ₹175 for this horse, but I have made up my mind to sell it to you. Now, do not be too hard on a poor horse-dealer. Give me ₹175.'

"I knew that all that bit about his starving children

and his being a poor horse-dealer was utter nonsense. Doubtless, he was a shrewd old trader who must have made a handsome profit on his livestock earlier in the day when he sold his horses and ponies–except the one that he was now foisting on me. So, with a stern look on my face I said I had better things to do than to waste my time haggling with him over the price of a horse that would be of no use to me if I bought it. And this time I turned my back on him with determination.

"'But won't you tell me, sir, what you want to pay for this horse?' the horse-dealer called after me desperately.

"Turning round, I gave the quadruped another appraising look and then said, '₹75 is the right price for it.'

"'What? Only ₹75 for this horse?' cried the horse-dealer, scandalized. 'Sir, I am selling you a horse, not a parrot or a pigeon.'

"I knew it was the most opportune moment for me to play my trump card. So, taking out ten crisp ten-rupee notes from my wallet, I said, 'All right, I do not want to be unjust to you. Now you cannot say that I am not paying you a fair price for your horse.' And forthwith I thrust ₹100 into his hand.

"The horse-dealer, looking perplexed and peeved, looked at the money and muttered something about the bad times when a horse and a sheep fetched the same price in the market. Grumbling thus, he pocketed the money and gave me the horse.

"So, that was my first success in haggling. The horse I had bought was not bad. In fact, everyone in my family had a word of praise for me when I told them how I had struck this profitable bargain. That horse remained with me for a few years.

"When I joined the army and left my village, I gave it to my younger brother. In short, the horse served our family, even in its advanced old age till death."

Both Siddharth and Tania had listened to their grandpa's horse-buying adventure with rapt attention.

And then Siddharth said, "Very strange, Grandpa, that you could get a horse for just ₹100. That sum would not buy even a hen today."

"You are right, my child,"

agreed Grandpa, "But in 1944, when I bought this horse, a hundred rupees was a handsome sum."

Suddenly, grandpa remembered something that had slipped his mind while he was narrating his horse-buying story. He had brought gifts for Siddharth and Tania. So, pulling out of his huge travelling-bag two brand new blankets he said, "These are for you."

"Oh, Grandpa, these lovely blankets also seem to be your recent purchase," both Siddharth and Tania said excitedly. "Won't you tell us how much these cost you?"

"That's another interesting story," replied grandpa with a wink, "but we will leave it for some other time."⌘

A Fearful Dream

Mahima Kaushik (10)
Layout: Subir Roy

I happened to see a dream,
Where I saw a dreadful future.
There were no trades, no fairs,
All because of the polluted air.

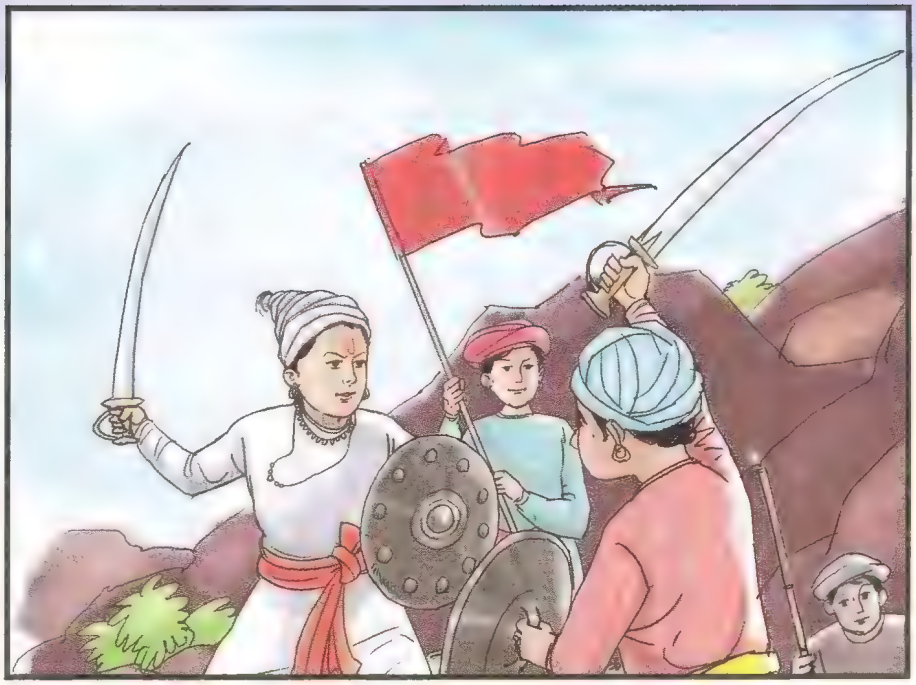
There's no gain in cursing the fate,
But check yourself and
Do not throw the polythenes around,
Do not dirty the children's playground.

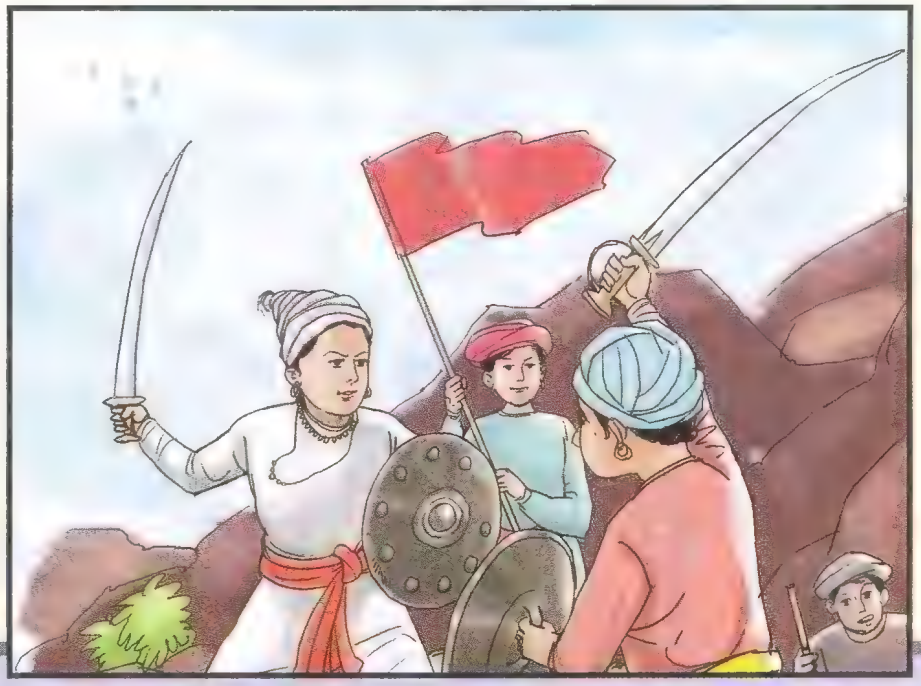
Do not litter everywhere,
Make your neighbours also aware.
Do not pollute water,
Do not pollute the lakes and rivers.

Once and for all stop it,
And let the guiding flame lit.
Then thinking of the future
Will not bring a scream,
And no longer will there be,
Fearful dreams.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCES

Brace yourself for this visual activity. Can you tell how the two pictures are different? Give yourself five minutes to spot at least 10 differences. More than that and you shall be crowned the winner. Mark the differences on the picture itself. Do not write on a separate sheet of paper. Your time starts now!





Winner of February 2012

Bansari R. Dalal (11)
St. Kabir School
Navrangpura, Ahmedabad

Photograph sent by
Merlyn Maria Antony (9)

"A VIP on the move!"
I clicked this pic while travelling in a local train in Velankanni, Kerala.

Click for Fun

Have you seen something lately that you wish to share with us? An interesting banner, an amusing poster, a comical hoarding or some seriously hilarious roadside news or happening?

Well...if you have the observation we have the space! All you need to do is click a picture of your 'object of amusement' and mail it to us with a brief description about where you found it, pronto! And we'll do the rest. Don't forget to write your name, age and postal address.

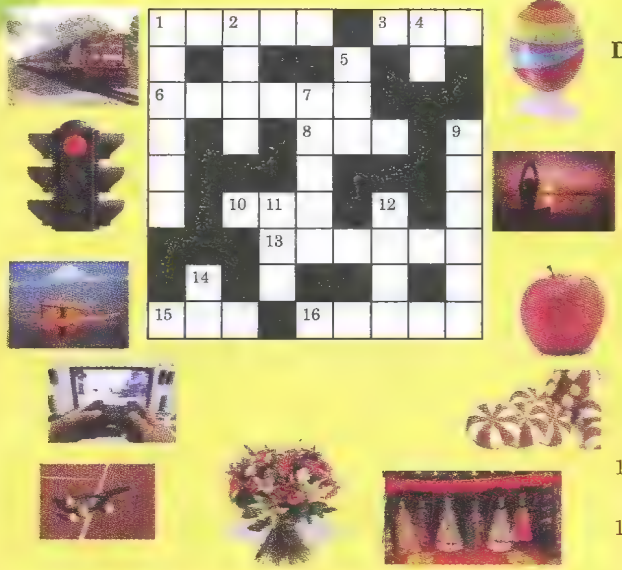
Your address for communication remains the same: cwmagazine.nd@gmail.com

JUNIOR WORD HUNT

for 6-8 years

Geeta Menon

Fill in this crossword and send it to us on or before **April 25, 2012.** THREE all-correct entries will get attractive prizes. So what are you waiting for? Get cracking!
(Xerox copies and faxed entries will not be considered.)



Across:

1. I go to bed _____ so that I get up at 4 in the morning. (5)
3. _____ away in the distance, a train whistled, opposite of 'near' (3)
6. I saw a policeman standing at the traffic _____. (6)
8. Palestine Liberation Organization was founded in 1964, abbreviation (3)
10. _____ Lake is in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. (3)
13. My daughter has a strong _____ to buy a Play Station, wish (6)
15. I was worried when my son came back after his tennis match with a _____ face, opposite of 'happy' (4)
16. _____ I buy flowers for my grandmother when I go to see her in the hospital, every day (5)

Down:

1. In the school we were asked to paint the eggs for _____ which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (6)
2. Violent anger (4)
4. I do yoga for ___ hour every day. (2)
5. We ____ went to see the puppet show, everybody (3)
7. An _____ a day keeps doctor away. (5)
9. A place where bread and cakes are made (6)
11. If you _____ the first ten digits you get 55. (3)
12. Flightless birds found in New Zealand (4)
14. Personal Assistant, abbreviation (2)

Turn to page 44 for the names of three prizewinners of Junior Word Hunt (February 2012). Look out for prizewinners of Junior Word Hunt (March 2012) in the next issue. Keep your 'toes' crossed till then!

(PLEASE FILL IN CAPITAL LETTERS. MAKE SURE YOU WRITE THE COMPLETE ADDRESS OF BOTH YOUR RESIDENCE AND SCHOOL TO ENABLE US TO SEND YOUR PRIZES.)

NAME.....AGE..... BOY/GIRL..... CLASS.....
ADDRESS.....
.....TEL.....
SCHOOL.....

Fleeing the Scene

Homagni Chaudhuri
Illustrations: Saurabh Pandey

"DADA, I will run away," Tabu said determinedly. He looked very upset.

Dada, Mr. De Chaudhuri, looked sympathetically at his grandson. A long-time resident of Jodhpur Park, he was addressed as Dada by all, even strangers.

When Dada asked, "Why?" Tabu replied, "I have to because I have commited a blunder. While I was filling the water jug it slipped and broke. And the water jug is mother's favourite."

"Please, Tabu, do not run away," Dada pleaded with Tabu. "Because if you do, I will have to go looking for you. And then if I do not find you, I will fall sick," he reasoned. "Of course, I had myself run away once," he continued, but I was only five years old then, still small and not a big boy like you of twelve years. Do you want to hear about it?"

Tabu, in spite of his impending troubles, got interested and settled down comfortably on the bean bag. He had not heard this story. Tabu failed to imagine Dada as a five-year-old. However, he remembered his father saying, "Your Dada's stories can be very interesting but you do not have to blindly swallow his every word. He often imagines things."

"It was a long time ago, in 1937...," Dada began, "...I was then in Kasthghar, a small locality in Sylhet town. In the early 1900's four brothers built their houses adjacent to each other while their ancestral home with ponds and farms was in the village. The brothers had studied in Kolkata. While two of them were lawyers, one was an MBBS doctor from the Kolkata Medical College, and the fourth an engineer.

The houses were on a motorable lane which connected two main roads of Sylhet town. At the back of the houses was a *jheel*, a large water body, partially overgrown with water hyacinth. Before proper roads were built and buses were known, boats and barges came up the rivers and canals and were moored in this *jheel* that was weed-free then. The houses were separated by brick walls but in each there was a

small wicket gate so that the ladies and children could move freely without having to go outside the compounds. Each house had a building called the *kachari,* directly facing the road. It was the office block.

"A clerk or two lived and worked in *kachari* and the male guests from the village and the rural boys studying in the town would be accommodated in its enclosed rear verandah. Behind the *kachari* was the courtyard which had the kitchens on the sides and a garden in the middle, and after that was the main house.

"By 1937, with grown-up sons and their families, each house had many members though sadly only one of the brothers, the doctor, was still around. He was addressed as *Boroda* which meant the eldest brother. Including those in the *kachari* and the servants, each house had over fifty inmates. As for the children, cousins could form full football teams to compete against each other.

"In the morning the children were given rice with boiled vegetables and mustard oil for breakfast. No cornflakes or eggs for children those days! There was no fruit juice either but plenty of seasonal fruits were available.

"Those not going to school were allowed to play wherever they liked, but of course, within the confines of these four houses.

"One morning, before going out after breakfast, I noticed a large glass jar with coconut sweets. I put one cane stool on top of another and climbed up to reach the jar of sweets. As my fingers touched the jar, suddenly the stool toppled over and I crashed to the ground with a loud noise. In the fall I hurt my head badly but the sight of the splintered glass jar stopped me from screaming.

Meanwhile, on hearing the crashing sound, an aunt came there to investigate. The moment I saw her, I ran! By the time she called out to me to stop, I had reached the wicket gate and from there I quickly disappeared."

"I made up my mind to stay away from home. A wise decision, as I knew mother would be very angry and slaps and knuckle blows on the head would follow."

Dada continued, "Now in this compound where I lived, often the head of one house would have a bitter argument with the head of a neighbouring house on something as small as an overhanging branch or something equally silly, and thereafter there would be a ban on visiting that particular house. But neither the ladies nor the children were involved in these fights or were stopped from interacting with each other.

"While most of us would return home for lunch, for the ones who lingered around, lunch was no problem. They would eat in whichever house they happened to be in at that time. In each household, the seniormost member had a giant bed where all the children were made to lie down for an afternoon nap. A count would be taken in the evening to check that each child was back home. No one was worried; it was very safe for the children as the only way to go out was through the verandah of the *kachari.*

"Meals would be prepared in each house by two Brahmin cooks and their helpers for fifty or even more people at one time. If it was a festive occasion, like a marriage or a baby's rice-eating ceremony, huge fireplaces were set up in the open where nearly a thousand people came to eat. Children were strictly barred from entering the kitchen except when called for meals. The Brahmin cooks were not to be touched, else they would have to bathe again. And if any food container was touched, that had to be thrown out. Lunch was served from nine in the morning till four in the evening.

"In each house there was a separate vegetarian kitchen for widowed ladies who did not eat meat or fish."

Dada stopped and looked at Tabu, "Nowadays everyone keeps asking what is to be cooked, what Tabu would like to eat and so on? In our time we longed for in-between snacks but had no luck except when we visited a vegetarian kitchen. There, a grandmother or a senior aunt would ask, "Do you want something to eat?" On vigorous nods of our heads, tiny brass plates with a little rice and some fried vegetables were offered to us from their share. These were their meal time preparations meant to be consumed by the older people and widowed ladies for lunch."

Tabu kept quiet, he wanted Dada to complete the story, but Dada now got up from his chair by the window. If Dada was not gardening or reading and writing, he liked to watch the world go by. The road outside their house was a short cut but a busy one at that.

Dada returned with a bar of dark chocolate. Though Dada was not very fond of sweets, chocolates was something he could not resist. Now he broke the bar into two and gave one piece of the chocolate to Tabu. "All this talk of food has made me hungry," he said.

"Those days," Dada continued, "there were no chocolates or coke, but Tabu, what you would have enjoyed were fruits in plenty. Not apples or strawberries but the local produce—litchis, pineapples, jackfruits, mangoes, etc.

Often we were not satisfied with what was given, so we would go and pluck fruits like green mangoes from the trees. That could be dangerous. The best trees were in *Boroda's* courtyard.

"*Boroda* had been in the Indian Medical Service and worked as a civil surgeon in Burma (now Myanmar). In those days he was friends with many of the Britishers and so he dressed like them. But now he only wore a dhoti. After the age of eighty he had even refused to treat patients. *Boroda* was very fond of little children and would spend hours with them. But this was only till they reached two years of age. After that they moved

around on their own and enjoyed plucking the leaves and flowers. When older, these children would aim stones at the fruits. They, the older children, in today's language became his 'class enemies'.

"*Boroda,* when in town, would have to rush out at intervals to shout at and chase away the children who were a constant menace to his beloved plants and trees. If anyone was caught, his ears were tweaked nice and hard. That child would run away in tears, but the rest, screaming wildly, would run around, daring *Boroda* to catch them. The loud noise brought the mothers running from various houses and the children were dragged away. 'So many of them,' Boroda would grumble, 'a swarm of locusts and their number keeps increasing.'

"That day, after eating my lunch in the neighbouring household, I was sitting on *Didimoni's* bed. She was known as a softie who gave protection to many a naughty children reprimanding the angry mothers thus: Of course you have to teach them good behaviour, but that does not mean you must harass them when they are with me. Every child needs a secured place."

Now seeing me sitting hopefully she said, "Biku, don't you worry, you are safe here."

"In the evening mother came to visit *Didimoni.* She was actually laughing. *"Biku* you are a brave boy," she said, hiding behind *Didimoni.* "Come home now and do not break any more jars, they are costly."

By the end of the story Tabu had forgotten about running away. He went to his mother and confessed courageously, "I have broken your favourite water jug. I am very sorry."

Tabu's mother said in a reconciled manner, "It's all right, you did not do it intentionally. Accidents do happen at times."⌘

A MOUSE IN THE HOUSE

Shivang Singh
Illustration: Saurabh Pandey

Once there was a mouse,
He lived in a house.
He sat on his knees,
And ate some cheese.
He lived in a big key-hole,
His best friend was Mr. Mole.
He was chased by a cat,
He really loved to chat.
He had a bath with a rubber duck,
And with soap he removed his muck.
He wandered around in a car,
From the cat, he parked it far.
Once there was a mouse,
He lived in a house...

THE LAST TIME

Shreya Dalmia
Layout: Ankur Mitra

The dawn broke and soon I woke
But as I sat I groaned and said,
"Another exam! my Boards!"
And clutched my throbbing head.

Just then another thought hit me
And the frown turned into a smile,
It was my last Board, my last exam
No more studies for a long while!

No more six-seven subjects to be studied
No more physics, maths or chemistry,
No more accounts, economics or commerce
No more geography or history.

The last Class XII Board meant
These were now things of the past,
No school to dread, no exams to fear
Now only good times would last.

And as I went about the day
I tried to keep my excitement low,
For it was not fully over yet
I still had one paper to take!

And as the hours eventually passed
After giving the paper we came out,
And exhaled a long, deep sigh of relief
And screamed a loud, joyous shout.

A shout that expressed our happiness
A shout that said we were done,
A shout similar to
Many others given before us
Yet to us, our special one.

And amidst the cheering in the dusky sky
A new thought dawned upon us,
Along with the last paper we had also
Left, for the last time
Our school hall.
This was it. It was over.
This was the final end.
And not only for our Boards
But also the days in school we'd spent.

As a new chapter would open
For us from tomorrow
This would all be long past,
But before we stepped
Into the first of the next
We would have to face this last.

And this irony of life
Hit us the hardest today,
Thirteen years ago we did not want
To come here.
And now we do not want to go away!

It appeared as if the Heavens too
Were showing us just how
We had started here at dawn
And were ending at dusk now.

How we had reached this end and last
Was to us a mystery,
Yet, little did we realize that tomorrow
This too would be a part of our history!

A Priceless Gem

Sarla Bhatia
Illustrations: Ankur Mitra

AS WE opened the main gate, he was there. The heavy rain had soaked him to the skin. The helpless pup lay at our door like an orphan. My younger son, Bubble, straightaway adopted him. That we were leaving for Calcutta the same day was of no concern to him. It was an achievement of sorts to smuggle him in a cane basket without letting the Indian Airlines ground staff know the contents of our hand baggage.

Once in the air, he was the darling of the air hostess who gave him milk and biscuits in plenty. At our home, he got used to pampering. But in a few weeks he showed his true colours. Cutting shoes to pieces, spoiling our bed with his wet paws or running into milk bottles to scatter them became his nefarious and routine activities.

I fumed, fretted and cursed the day I let my boys bring Kaizer home. My husband had gone on tour and I was all by myself in my bed when I felt Kaizer's paws. He wanted to ease himself. It was the middle of the night. There was no power, hence Bubble and I had to climb down the steps from our eighth floor flat in pitch darkness. Even before we had reached the sixth floor, the fellow stopped in his tracks. I knew of the misery that lay in store for me. The stairs would have to be washed and cleaned up before the neighbours got up for their morning walk.

My heart nearly sank when I opened the door the next morning and Mr. Basu, the caretaker of Minto Park, walked in.

"Mrs. Dayal," he began, "either you please toilet

-train Kaizer or you hand him over to someone who lives on the ground floor. You do not know the trouble I go through in getting the compound cleaned up. This pet of yours is very ill-trained. We will miss the Governor's Cup this year if Kaizer continues to behave in this way. You know, Madam, Minto Park has been winning this prize for the last ten years, since the time I came here. Our garden is the best in Calcutta and I cannot afford to have it spoiled."

I was speechless because there was not a grain of truth in Mr. Basu's words.

"I will definitely do something, Mr. Basu. Please accept my apologies," I replied to him.

Since that day we started looking for a suitable guardian for Kaizer. It would be painful to again have Mr. Basu advise or warn me. The word got round to everyone in Minto Park of our intention. Not many days later Bidhan, the young milkman, stayed back to talk to me after handing over the milk bottles to my maid, Mangla.

"Baiji, the gatekeeper tells me that you want to give away Kaizer," he asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes, Bidhan, we live so high up that poor Kaizer cannot move about freely," I told him.

"Baiji, we have a small cottage with a lot of open space. Please give him to me," Bidhan almost pleaded.

"Look, this little fellow is priced at ₹800," Mangla put in a poser.

"Oh, no," I intervened, "we don't want to sell Kaizer. It is for free but its new guardian must take care of him."

"Baiji, I will definitely love this pup of yours," assured Bidhan.

"Of course, I believe you. But who will attend to him when you are out on your rounds?"

"At home my mother, brother and sister are there. They will look after Kaizer."

"But it is quite costly to maintain a pet dog, Bidhan," I said and then added, "can you afford it?"

"Baiji, milk is no problem. And we are a non-vegetarian family, therefore, meat and bones can be given to him. Have no doubts, Madam," said Bidhan reflecting tremendous confidence in taking on the new responsibility.

I still persisted, "Do you realize that there will be expenses of medicines, injections and doctor's fees too?"

"I earn ₹1500 per month, Baiji. I will ensure that Kaizer is healthy and happy with us," was Bidhan's reply.

Vicky came out of his room just as this conversation was going on. "Mummy, it is enough. Give Kaizer to Bidhan. He will keep him well. I want peace in this house."

Bubble too came along but he raised no objection. He knew that he had lost because of the dog's ill manners. That day Kaizer went away with Bidhan.

I felt relieved and lived the next few days without any tension. But our house was not the same any more. The boys came home from their schools and walked into their rooms without a word. Kaizer used to bark his head off as soon as he got a whiff of Vicky and Bubble in the lift. All my shouting to silence him was an absolute waste. The boys laughed and jumped with their pet.

In Kaizer's absence I could no longer hear endearments like, "My beautiful Kaizer... My black honey... Oh, my sweetie pie and so on." Each of us was quiet and forlorn. It was as if no more chores were left for us in the house—no running for his dinner plate, bread or milk. It seemed our lives existed for Kaizer. We all looked at the vacant spot where he used to sit every time we got together at the table for breakfast or dinner but spoke nothing. The silence around us reflected the void within us.

One day I told the milkman, "Bidhan, bring Kaizer with you when you come this evening. The children are eager to see him."

"All right, Baiji. Tomorrow evening at 4 p.m. Kaizer will be here for you to see. Only then will you believe that I have kept him well."

With bated breath we waited for Kaizer the following day. Vicky and Bubble came home well before their usual time lest Bidhan should take Kaizer away without waiting for them. Even at the slightest sound Mangla would scurry to the door only to return blank-eyed and cursing Bidhan. Four o'clock and then five o'clock—there was no sign of Bidhan with Kaizer We were all panicky.

"That milkman will not come," said Bubble with despair.

"Why do you say so?" I asked anxiously.

"He is the dog's owner, the master. I suppose our wish does not matter to him," replied Bubble.

"Nonsense. Bidhan cannot claim rights on Kaizer in a matter of just two days," Vicky retorted angrily.

"Kaizer is a priceless gem. Baiji, I hope Bidhan has not sold him off to make a quick buck," said Mangla, skeptical as usual.

"Dare he sell him! We will lodge an FIR with the police," spoke Vicky with authority in his voice. He then directed Bubble, "You go with Mani (our driver) to Bidhan's house and make sure that Kaizer is well. There should be no hanky-panky."

The evening passed, still Bidhan did not appear. Our worry showed on our faces. None of us could eat our dinner properly. Suddenly Vicky said, "Mummy, I am scared. I do not have the courage to say..."

"Say what?" I was trembling by then.

"Perhaps Kaizer has met with an accident. Bidhan once told us that his cottage is along a busy road."

As I listened to Vicky my heart skipped many beats. 'Oh, Lord, is it going to be the same case as Masha's?' The horrifying scene of last year appeared before my eyes. The white, serene and listless body of Masha in Vicky's arms. I felt choked with agony and self-guilt. Why did I give Kaizer away to Bidhan? My conscience questioned me. Kaizer was just two years old, a kid only. He would have learnt to behave. Were not Vicky and Bubble naughty too? Further, they were a virtual nuisance for the neighbours. But would I every think of

giving Vicky and Bubble away. Just because Kaizer was an animal, I did so. Now I am the killer of an innocent pup.

I tossed in my bed with a heavy head all night long.

I walked upto the main door well before daybreak, waiting for Bidhan. He usually came at 5.30 a.m. to deliver milk to us. I could hear the lift stopping at our floor. In spite of a throbbing head full of doubts, I flung the door open.

"Why did you not come yesterday? Where is Kaizer, Bidhan? Is he safe?" I was panting with anger.

"Baiji, *maaf karo* (forgive me). Some guests suddenly came to our house. In fact, they were considering my sister for marriage with their son. The boy is B.A. pass..."

"All right, that's enough. Bring Kaizer at 4 p.m. today. No more excuses, please," I was still restless.

Bidhan could not gauge my pain and went away with disbelief at my concern for Kaizer whom I was so keen to banish only a weeks ago.

We relived the agonising moments again before Kaizer's arrival. We were all there. Vicky, Bubble, Mangla and I—tense, quiet and with scores of unpleasant forebodings in our minds.

Bidhan appeared at the door before time. We could hear Kaizer's throatful barking even before opening the door. And lo! Kaizer bounced out of Bidhan's hands and darted inside the house. Vicky and Bubble ran after him. One by one we hugged him and kissed him and the house burst with hurrahs of joy. I could not believe this burst of happiness in my house. The boys had collected a heapful of cake, bread and rusks on a plate, laced with hard bones. But Kaizer was licking my feet, jumping at my hands, in the manner of kissing them.

I took a decision there and then: "Kaizer is not going back, children," I said loudly.

"Three cheers for our Mummy! Three cheers for our Kaizer!"

Bidhan came back after his round only to be astonished at the change of my heart.⌘

When I was Alive

Pragya Gupta (14)

Life was beautiful for me
When I was in this world,
When I was alive.
Those childhood days spent
In the caressing arms of a
Beautiful lady and a gentleman
I called parents.

Why? Oh God, Why did you
Call me up so early?
So early, that l could not
Even ponder on what I was doing?
My mum cries, my father weeps.
Oh! what sin did I do in
My previous life?

Far away from the world below
I'm here with you, God,
If I was so dear to you
Then why did you send me to Earth?

I'll cherish those days
I spent with you, Mother and Father,
I'll still remember you in this world,
In this world which comprises of
God and Me.

The Stranger Who Helped Me

Harshita Sharma (12)
Illustration: Ankur Mitra

LAST SUMMER I had to give an exam. My friends were busy and my mom was not well, so, I had to go alone. I prepared my bag and went to sleep.

When I woke up, I was horrified to find that I was late! I rushed to the bus stop. I was delighted to see that my bus had not yet come. Then I saw it coming and I boarded the bus. I went and sat next to an old gentleman. A little later, the bus conductor came to me to issue a ticket. That's when I realized that in my hurry, I had left my wallet at home!

I told the conductor, "I am sorry I have left my wallet at home."

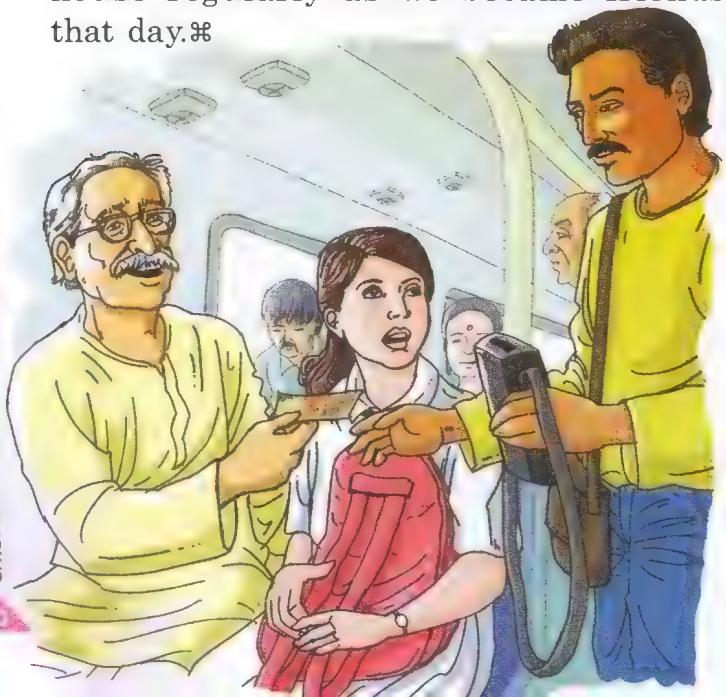
"Then get off the bus, beggars are not allowed," he replied in a rather rude way.

Then the old man sitting next to me intervened and gave the conductor my bus fare.

I thanked him and quickly took his phone number and address.

My exam went off well. In the evening I went to the old man's house to return the money. He refused to take it.

Since that day I go to the old gentleman's house regularly as we became friends that day.⌘



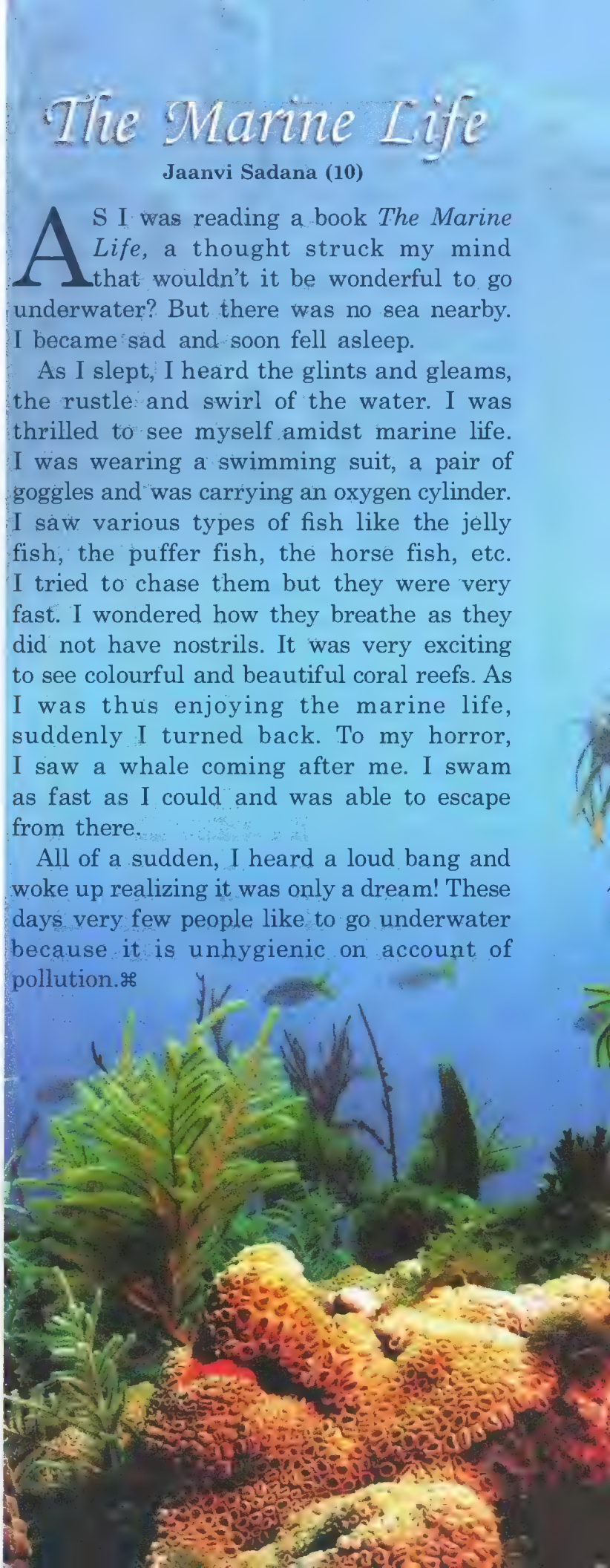
The Marine Life

Jaanvi Sadana (10)

AS I was reading a book *The Marine Life,* a thought struck my mind that wouldn't it be wonderful to go underwater? But there was no sea nearby. I became sad and soon fell asleep.

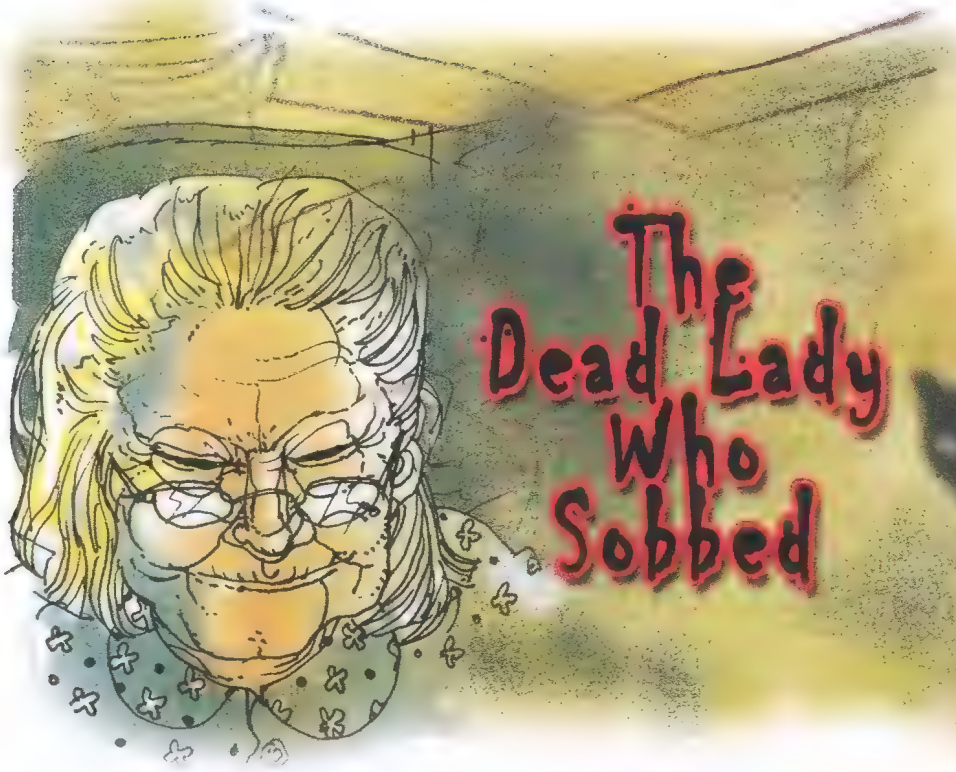
As I slept, I heard the glints and gleams, the rustle and swirl of the water. I was thrilled to see myself amidst marine life. I was wearing a swimming suit, a pair of goggles and was carrying an oxygen cylinder. I saw various types of fish like the jelly fish, the puffer fish, the horse fish, etc. I tried to chase them but they were very fast. I wondered how they breathe as they did not have nostrils. It was very exciting to see colourful and beautiful coral reefs. As I was thus enjoying the marine life, suddenly I turned back. To my horror, I saw a whale coming after me. I swam as fast as I could and was able to escape from there.

All of a sudden, I heard a loud bang and woke up realizing it was only a dream! These days very few people like to go underwater because it is unhygienic on account of pollution.⌘



Mohit Badoni
Illustrations: Subir Roy

The Dead Lady Who Sobbed



IT WAS the first time that I was attending a Christian funeral. Mrs. Castellino died last night. The only funeral that I had attended was four years ago when my grandfather had died. My grandfather was cremated beside River Ganges at Haridwar.

Mrs. Castellino's body was found cold and lifeless in her bed. Brother Thomas, with the help of a few locals, had organized her funeral at the local graveyard of YWCA. The coffin was lowered inside, then covered with mud.

I was doing my graduation from Municipal College. My financial constraints had forced me to pick up a part-time job in a hotel. I attended my classes in the morning and in the evening, from five till midnight, I was at the front office desk of a small hotel handling all sorts of guests. There were businessmen, newly-wed couples, families with children, college brats flaunting their wealth and others who were there hiding from the world behind closed doors.

My home was about two miles from the hotel. But if I took a shorter route, via the Camel's Back Road, I saved almost a half-a-mile's walk. The Camel's Back Road was a lonely road and the only visible thing on that one mile forlorn track was a huge bungalow that belonged to Mrs. Castellino called Summer Hall Cottage. Mrs. Castellino lived there all by herself. She never had any friends or relatives in India. After her husband Major Castellino's death, Mrs. Castellino decided to stay alone in her bungalow. The only other soul in that house was a cat which she kept for company. Mrs. Castellino survived on the pension of her dead husband who had been an officer in the British Indian Army.

That day again, after a sickening and tiresome seven hours at the front office desk, when I was trudging along the desolate Camel's Back Road in a carefree manner, thinking about the hot food and cozy bed waiting at home for me, when suddenly something unusual caught my attention. I heard a

strange sound of somebody crying at a distance. I tried to concentrate on the sound and to follow it. My steps led me towards the Summer Hall Cottage. I tried to recall the sound. I thought I had heard it somewhere. It was a sob of a lady in deep pain.

After jogging my memory more, I recollected where I had heard it before. Before I could be sure about it, the sound gave me goose bumps. I recalled these were the sobs of Mrs. Castellino. I was sure it was the same sound I had heard a couple of days ago.

The day before yesterday, while I was going towards the hotel for my part-time job, I had heard a sobbing sound coming from Mrs. Castellino's house. I had gone inside, probably for the first time, to ask her if she needed some help. As I went inside, through the door that was left open, I found Mrs. Castellino lying in her bed in deep agony. Mrs. Castellino was an old lady, probably ninety years old.

"Mrs. Castellino, are you all right?"I asked her.

"My son, for the past two days I'm down with fever. My body is aching badly and I cannot even get up from my bed." She took a deep breath while I stood beside her thinking how difficult it is to survive on one's own when you are old.

"Son, would you do me a favour?" she asked me.

"Yes, please tell me," I said to her.

"Will you call the doctor for me?"

"Sure, I will call him right now." I said, and left from there.

I was already getting late for work. Wasting more time

right away in contacting the doctor would encroach further into my office timing for which I would have to stay back a few more hours after twelve at work. So, I decided to call the doctor the following morning.

As promised, the next morning I went to Mrs. Castellino's house with a doctor. But she was already dead.

As I shook myself out of this reverie, I realized the sobs that I heard now were those of Mrs. Castellino.

I was horrified, but after some introspection I concluded, I was possibly just imagining them after my late night schedule.

That night after my dinner I went to bed. Usually I dozed off within a minute, but that day I was unable to sleep peacefully. Mrs. Castellino's sobs were drumming in my ears which kept me awake. I could not erase the memory of her pleading with me to call a doctor or she would die. The whole night the old lady must have looked at the door expecting a doctor to walk in. A sense of guilt gripped me.

The next day was my off day from the hotel. After my classes, I got busy with my friends and a soap opera on television. I had almost forgotten about Mrs. Castellino. Life takes its own course and gradually you tend to forget some of the irrelevant things.

It was the peak season and all hotels were flooded with tourists. Hence the next day was again a busy day with seven hours of non-stop tiring work at the front office desk handling customers and attending to their calls.

After my hectic schedule I was once again at the Camel's Back Road, heading towards home. I never thought about Mrs. Castellino until I reached her house. Now once again I heard those sobs; my senses became alert and a current ran down my spine.

I hurried towards my home and heaved a sigh of relief only after I had crossed Camel's Back Road. After that day I never took Camel's Back Road home even if I had to walk half a mile extra.

A week passed by and I had almost forgotten about Mrs. Castellino and her sobs. Then, on the seventh day, the skies opened up and it started raining heavily. The whole night it rained. With the result the route which I took home had knee-deep water. The authorities had blocked the road for repair work and would reopen only after a month.

Now I had no option but to take the Camel's Back Road to get home. The mere thought of Mrs. Castellino and her sobs made me restless, but I had no choice. I moved hastily along the route. As I approached Summer Hall Cottage I again heard her sobs. I was afraid and did not even look towards the cottage. I ran towards home shivering and sweating in fear. The whole night I was unable to sleep. The only thing that revolved in my mind was the weak and feeble face of Mrs. Castellino and the humming sound of her sobs in my ears.

Day and night I was restless. I could hear her sobs even during my classes, I heard them at work. I heard them all the time. All I would think about was Mrs. Castellino. A sense of guilt constantly prevailed within me. I should have helped her when I knew Mrs. Castellino was ill and in pain. I should have shown urgency and called the doctor at that very moment. Immediate medical aid might have saved Mrs. Castellino and she might have lived for a few more years. Now I was convinced that the ghost of Mrs. Castellino was haunting me.

My behavioural pattern started changing. Earlier, I rarely got annoyed on any issue. Now I lost my temper

on petty issues. I was unable to sleep well or even eat properly. I remained aloof. Every moment I thought of only Mrs. Castellino and her sobs echoing in my ears.

Then one day, in the evening, while I was going towards the hotel, I again heard the sobs. I was already frustrated. Today I decided to settle the score once and for all. I decided to do something which I had never dared to do all these days. I decided to go inside the house and tell the ghost of Mrs. Castellino to stop bothering me. If she is annoyed with me, she can kill me but it is difficult to live with a ghost haunting you day and night. I followed the voice towards the haunted house.

I walked along the gravelled pathway and entered the garden. The front door was locked. The nameplate of Mrs. Castellino still hung on one side of the door while on the other side another board proclaimed the name of the cottage—Summer Hall Cottage—in bold.

I broke one of the window panes and unlatched the window. I jumped inside the house. The sobs were now more clear and rampant. I followed the voice; I tried to concentrate in order to find the direction. Was it the lobby or the bedroom? I tried to follow. My footsteps led me towards the kitchen.

In one corner of the kitchen lay a big carton. I knew the sobs were coming from that carton. 'Is Mrs. Castellino's ghost trapped inside the carton? No, how could that be? Spirits cannot be trapped. Then what was it?' I was a bit confused. Slowly I went near the carton and tried to look inside. Suddenly a big black cat jumped out of the carton and ran towards the lobby. My heart was almost in my mouth.

I slowly peeped inside the carton. There lay two little kittens, mewing! I sat down on the floor with my feet drawn to my chest and back resting against the wall. My heart was beating like an express train and my knees were shivering. I took a deep breath and gently took the kittens in my arm.

'So it was the mewing of these little devils that was haunting me all these days.'

I took both the kittens home. One was christened Agatha and the other Amilo.

After a day their mother Lucy too joined me and her little kittens in my home.⌘

NEVER SAY DIE

Ruchi Sharma
Illustrations: Sanjay Sarkar

RAHUL WAS an intelligent boy. He always figured among the top three positions in his class.

He was creative and had a vivid imagination. In the first term exams, his essay on 'My journey in Space' impressed his English teacher immensly.

However, Rahul was not happy in the school. His bespectacled face was the target of much mocking and mirth. The bullies in his class labelled him *'chaukha'* or 'four-eyed', an aberration. He was the butt of their jokes. He tried retorting but the taunts only intensified.

United, these hooligans were a formidable bunch. It is true that bullying is a phenomenon that finds one or the other form in almost every school and college. Certain elements believe that might is right. And the fact that his mother taught in the same school only accentuated Rahul's misery. The bullies suspected that he was gaining favours on account of her being there though that was not the case.

Previously Rahul studied in a different school. But when his parents constructed their own house in West Delhi, he had to take admission in his mother's school as the school bus of his former school did not ply on that route.

Rahul bore things passively. He did not complain to his mother for fear that they would harass him further by putting the tag 'Mama's boy'.

To offset the relentless bullying, Rahul began to rest his spectacles half way down his nose so that his eyes would be fully visible. His mother could not fathom the reason for this change in appearance. She alongwith other teachers tried to tell him to give up this undesirable habit as his eyesight would further weaken. But Rahul remained

adamant.

Even then the bullies continued teasing him. In fact, Rahul found that the situation had worsened now for the ruffians had started calling him *'boodha'* meaning 'an aged man'. Some even called him nerdy. He was hounded by their barbs and could not concentrate on his studies. From a cheerful and happy-go-lucky boy, Rahul became reserved, irritable and inflexible. He became emotionally disturbed. Someone who dreamt of becoming an astronaut was feeling forcibly grounded. All this affected Rahul's performance in school.

His behaviour caused his mother a lot of distress. After having taught for many years, all methods and techniques of handling a distraught child, came to nought. He did not do well in the Class X Board exams. His performance was just above average. His father fretted and fumed but could not get to the crux of the problem.

Taking him to a corner one day, he had a man-to-man talk with him, Rahul revealed his problem and anguish. He confided that he felt choked in the stifling environment of the school. He then expressed his wish to change his school.

His father said, "Which school would you like to shift to?"

Rahul suggested the name of the school which had a track record of the most successful candidates in medical and engineering entrance exams. His father was nonplussed.

He said, "With the marks you have obtained in the Class X board exams, I am skeptical whether you will get admission there."

Rahul had surfed the net and had all the required information.

He said, "The school holds an admission test too."

His father said, "I will discuss the matter with your mother."

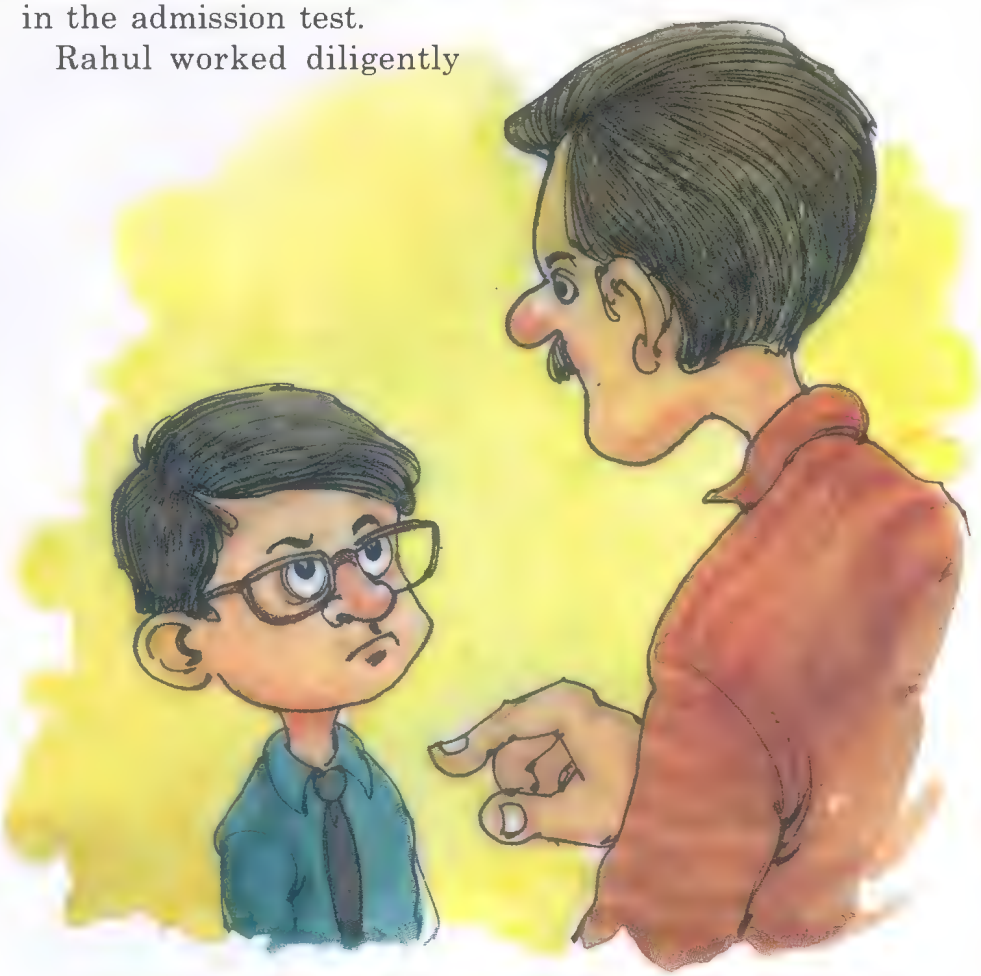
His parents discussed things and thought it prudent to let him appear in the admission test.

Rahul worked diligently and topped in the admission test displaying his grit and determination towards the purpose.

Rahul was on cloud nine when the results were announced. His trauma would hopefully be over. His parents agreed to the change of school provided he wore his spectacles properly. They explained that otherwise his eyesight would weaken and he would stand to lose.

Rahul understood that this was the last ditch effort that would make or mar his future and so promised to obey his parents.

Rahul found the atmosphere in the new school welcoming as compared to the oppressive atmosphere



of his former school.

Rahul was put in the ability section on the basis of his score in the admission test. Nobody bullied him or made fun of him because he wore specs.

He observed that all the students there were keen to study and learn. Even in free periods, his classmates would be finishing assignments of their coaching classes for medical and engineering entrance exams. All heads would be visibly engrossed and all faces a study in concentration.

Inspired by his fellow students, Rahul put his heart and soul into his studies imbibing efficient study skills from his fellow students. He too joined the coaching classes. His schedule became hectic. After school he would attend the coaching institute classes and reach home late.

As time elapsed, he devised a three-pronged approach which was a balance of academics, exercise and entertainment. He would reach school early so that he could play football, something he really loved. In the evening he would watch T.V. for sometime. For two years, he followed the same routine.

Ultimately he received the fruit of his labour. He got admission in two premier engineering colleges. His success gave his parents immense happiness.

Rahul had tasted success because all his hurdles had been removed.

"So it had been the right choice, after all," conceded his parents.

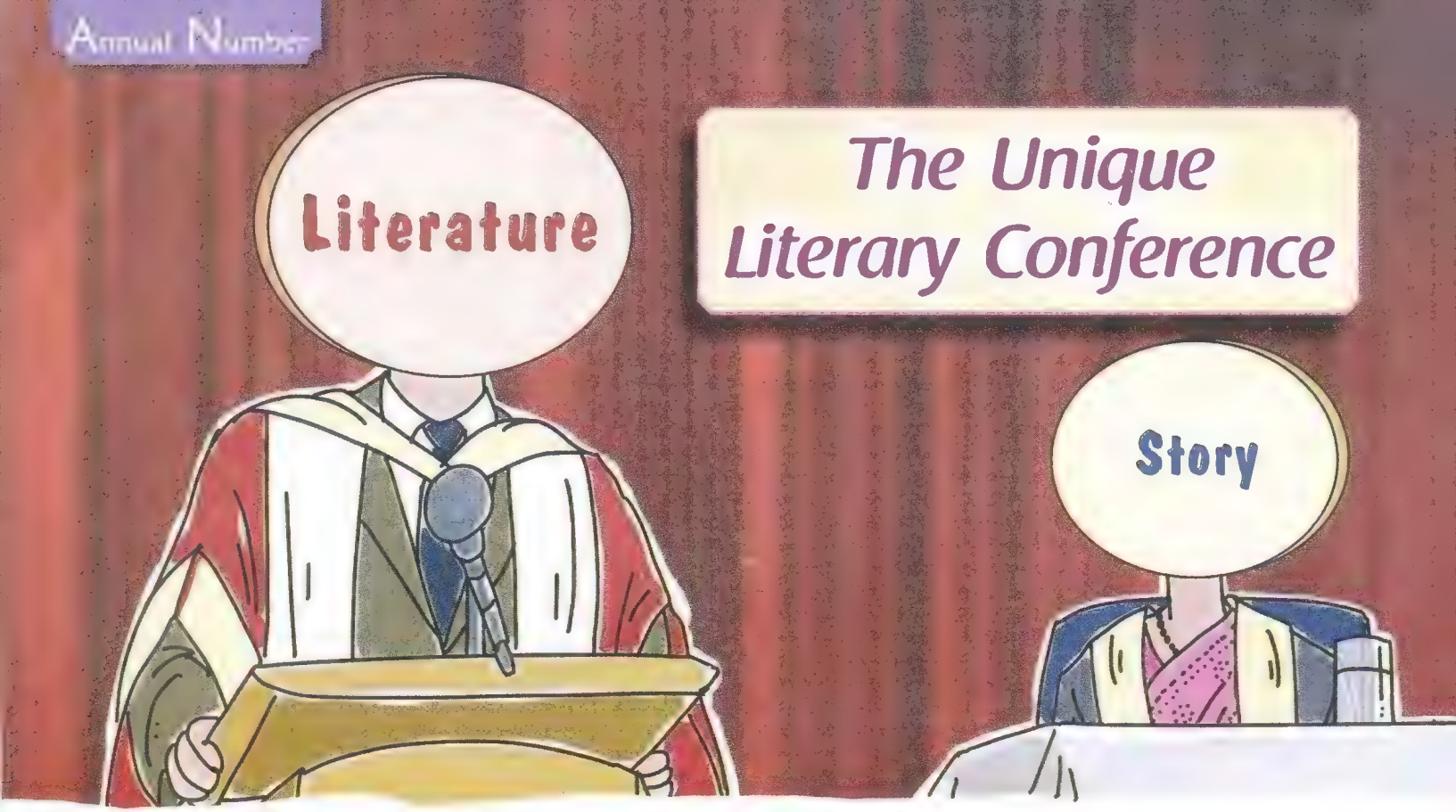
In reality, Rahul's decision to shift out was a form of passive resistance aiming at avoiding the evil for one's own well-being. It had helped him chart a new course of life. After all, God helps those who help themselves.⌘

Season of Celebration or War

Shweta Kalra (12)
Illustration: Sanjay Sarkar

Season of celebration
Doesn't mean the season of every nation,
The wars that brew never cease
There are no boundaries and no ease.
Wars hold destructive power,
Never-ending people are sacrificed
For small slices of land.
Is it nice?
We should feel ashamed of ourselves,
To fight for petty things in our life.
Be patriotic but not fanatic,
Bloody wars will then not penetrate
In the deep core of our hearts.

The Unique Literary Conference



THE WORD went round that an exclusive literary conference was going to be held. Now this was enough to bring the crowds rushing to the assigned venue. The gathering was beyond the expectations of the organizers.

Literature was the chief guest at the function. Being a stickler for punctuality, Literature arrived on time. An ornate chair was placed on the stage for him.

All the participants—Story, Drama, Poetry and Prose—had made themselves comfortable in their seats. And this very fact had made the event unique for the audience. They were very excited about it and waited impatiently for the conference to begin.

First of all, the stage-director delivered the welcome speech, greeting the chief guest, the participants and all the others present there. Then he invited Story to share her views with the gathering.

Story could not contain her happiness for just being there. "I am extremely grateful," began Story, "for having come across such a rare opportunity to express my innermost feelings before you all! Basically, all my companions and I entertain you, besides increasing your knowledge. It is a well-known fact that we influence people's personality...but please do not consider me conceited if I say that I am the most important of them all. I know you will agree with me..." Then throwing a glance in all directions she continued, "this too is a fact that everyone, from the children to grown-ups, like me in all my forms. I always prove to be a good friend when one is lonely. I am everyone's favourite..."

Story was going on blowing her trumpet when there started some whispering amongst the audience.

Someone in the audience said, "I really do not like reading a story...I'd rather..."

Somebody else said, "I can't stand stories...!"

Having come face to face with reality, Story realized that after all she was not as popular as she had perceived herself to be! She soon wound up her talk and occupied her seat glumly.

Now it was the turn of Poetry to enunciate her feelings. Poetry was also

Parambir Kaur
Illustration: Ankur Mitra

very happy to be a part of the conference. To begin with Poetry burst into a poem at once:

"So different am I,
In size and stature.
No doubt I am,
The pride of literature.
I know that everyone,
Likes my nature."

The listeners were regaled with this novel expression.

Actually the assembly was taking keen interest in the proceedings and they were all attention.

Poetry further stated seriously, "It is my good fortune that I have this chance to share my feelings with you all. I have always felt that I am the most popular form of literature! I have got rhythm and everyone enjoys reading or listening to me... So many serious messages can be conveyed through me in a few words, by using symbols and imageries, and so on. I'm sure that I am literature's favourite. And giving happiness to people makes me cheerful."

When Poetry was thus busy eulogizing herself, someone amongst the audience whispered, "I don't like poetry. In fact, I cannot even follow it many a times..."

And it did not take long for Poetry to realize that not everybody is fond of her.

The compere then requested Drama to share his views with the gathering.

Drama started with great confidence, "Basically, I have no comparison with any other literary genre. I am one of my own kind! People enjoy reading me as well as seeing me when I am enacted on stage. In fact, I rule the stage! I can actually claim to be the most important part of literature. And I doubt if anyone present here would object to this statement..."

Even though no one openly challenged Drama's assertions but some low voices coming from the crowd made it quite clear that all those present there were not of the same opinion.

Finally, it was the turn of Prose to address the congregation.

Prose started off in a very humble manner. "I have my own existence without doubt and possess simplicity, fluency and attraction which just carry the reader along. I am sure many of you here, must be having a liking for me! Sometimes you come across parts of poetry, drama

or story in me... I rather take it as a compliment or you can call it my generosity. I firmly believe that all of us are making this world a better place to live in..."

Prose expressed many more similar views and when it finished, the hall reverberated with cheers from the audience. Everyone there was enjoying the proceedings to the hilt. It was a unique experience after all, listening to all the genres of literature!

The compere thanked all the participants and requested the chief guest now to say a few words.

Literature, first of all, thanked the organizers: "We are grateful to you for having provided us an opportunity to share our views with all of you. Our thanks also to you for sparing so much of your precious time for us. The speakers, you just listened to, are all my inseparable parts. In fact, I owe my existence to them. But listening to their views in this manner was a novel experience for me as well."

Literature then went on to address its genres, "I would like to tell you all that each of you is in a class of your own and equally significant. Just as you are different from one another, similarly, the readers too have their own choices and everyone selects their reading material accordingly. I just want to tell you that maintaining a good standard should be your top priority. We owe it to them as well (making a gesture towards the audience)."

At this the participants nodded in agreement.

Now Literature was speaking to the congregation, "We owe so much to all of you! It is only your interest in us which makes our existence meaningful. I only wish that you would spend more time with us. It will boost our morale to no end...the time spent with you today, is going to be unforgettable for us. Thank you very much."

The audience, who had been as if in a trance so far, became very sad when Literature finished his talk.

One of the organizers summing up the day's proceedings said, "The way you all, as audience, have thronged this place, clearly indicates your enthusiasm and interest in literature. You have really made today's programme a complete success. It is indeed tough for us to evaluate the job that Literature and its genres are doing for us. They spread the light of knowledge and are making this world a better place. I promise on your behalf that we shall definitely spend more time in their company and inspire our friends and acquaintances also to do the same!"

The audience endorsed this promise with a loud clapping.⌘

My Awarenes Towards This World

Guneet Kaur

I wandered here and there
To make myself aware
Of this shiny world,
But its thinking is so old.
I wandered here and there
To make myself aware
Of the honest people's condition,
Against whom cruel people are
Making coalition.
I wandered here and there
To make myself aware
Of Nature,
But people are destroying it
Not thinking about earth's future.
I wandered here and there
To make myself aware
Of my characteristics,
That am I full of good qualities?
The answer I got was
Yes, I am the best.
I wandered here and there
To make myself aware...

ONE LINE SAYS IT ALL!

(for age group 7-15 years)

A picture speaks a thousand words...
Your skill lies in telling us what it says
in just a few words.
See the picture...
Observe what it says...
Write a caption...and
Send it to us...
Fast! Fast! Fast!
Best caption wins a prize!
Last date of receiving entries:
April 25, 2012.

HURRY!

One Line Says it All Results

Plant more trees,
Don't let our earth perish,
Greener earth is a dream,
We all cherish.
Sangeeta Mishra (11), New Delhi

*

Plant a tree once a year
Will make you cheerful for the whole year.
Ujjwal Aggarwal (10), New Delhi

*

Don't be mean,
Please go green!
Plant a tree,
For it will bring glee!
Srijan Bhatia (11), New Delhi

*

Trees give us health
But even then people are
Greedy for its wealth.
Unnati Jain (10), New Delhi

*

Grow a tree every day,
To make the earth better,
That's the only way!
Saumya Verma (13)

*

Planting trees together,
Makes everyone happy forever.
Samrat Ganguli (11), Odisha

*

Plant more trees, plant more trees
Trees provide fruit, flowers and shade.
Protect them because we need them.
So that this God's gift doesn't fade.
Heba Ahmad (11), NOIDA

*

Have some kindness for others
And for the trees even more,
Trees sustain our dear life
Then shouldn't we sustain the tree's life?
Kanisha Shah (13), Ahmedabad

*

Let us plant trees so that we can
Make our world green
And can stop global warming.
Rushabh Mehta (13), Ahmedabad

*

Go Green to make our Earth a Queen!
Also, keep it clean to fulfil our dream!
Mullick Gupta (11), Punjab

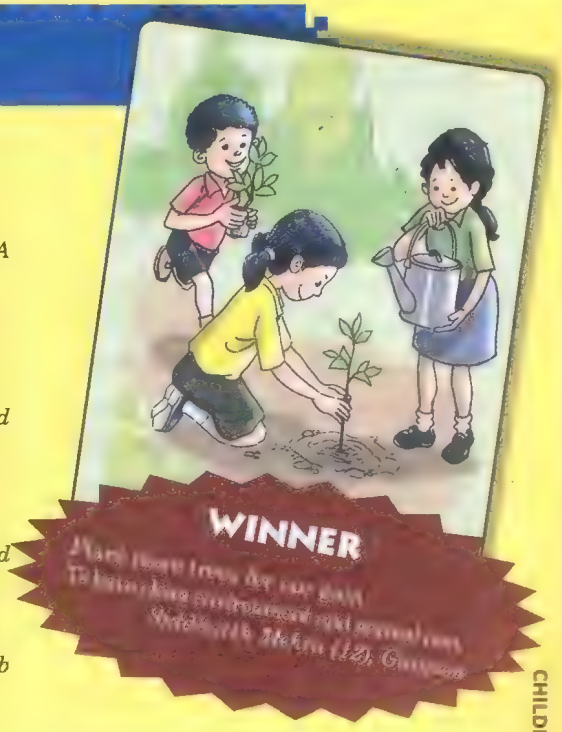
*

Let's go, let's go, let's plant a tree,
Let's make the earth pollutioin-free!
Deeksha Khan (8), Munirka

*

Plants are our friends
And we don't hurt our friends
Instead we encourage them
So, grow more trees.
Jahnvi Bhambhani (10), Delhi

*



Plant a tree, nurture it with care and love
As it gives you everything free.
Pritika Mehta (11), Delhi

*

Plants make the nature beautiful
And nature makes the world beautiful
So, we should grow more and more trees.
Vinayak S. Gadad, Karnataka

The Flash that Lightened Up The Selvams

Vanisree
Illustrations: Sanjay Sarkar

THE ADVENT of inverters has undoubtedly been a blessing to those who have been victims of frequent power-cuts. But on the flip side, it has more or less laid off whatever little time one used to get to communicate with the family members in the event of a power-cut.

With due respect to the breakthrough invention, courtesy Toshiba, a break in the continuous power supply in Raman's home provided the much-needed break in his life. For once, the battery was not charged enough to provide the family even with the bare minimum supply necessary to run a fan or even a tube light, leave aside the television, during the humid July night.

Raman, the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Selvam had been craving since a long time to spend some time with his busy parents. The only time he got to do so was during their trip during the month of May this year which lasted for just about four to five days, a mere fraction of the forty-five days summer holidays.

His educated mother had been happy as a homemaker till a year ago but had to

step out of the house forced by inflation to share the financial responsibility along with his father.

Raman's parents had good relations with the neighbours, an old couple, who gave assured them that they must not worry about Raman. It was only after Raman's parents weighed the pros and cons of doing a job that Raman's mother decided to go the extra mile.

Once money started flowing in, meeting materialistic demands became the priority with the Selvams. Within almost a year they had all the comforts they could ask for to be happy with.

Raman, who had just completed ten years, bore the brunt of this materialistic mentality. The sudden shift in his life in the absence of his mother at home was a bit too much for him. He had got adjusted the hard way to the fact that he had to be all by himself from around 3.30 in the afternoon till the time his mother got back from work in the evening. Sundays just flew by with pending work at home or at times with relatives dropping in.

Although he enjoyed it when his father dropped him by car which was bought on loan, he still could not fathom as to why his mother needed to get employed.

He also liked it when, in the event of a power failure, of almost thirty flats in the their colony, his was among the only four or five flats where a tube light would be glowing in full glory and that they did not have to use a newspaper to fan themselves as in earlier times.

Despite these so-called luxuries, Raman felt a vacuum. For him the time spent with his mother mattered the most. She was his best friend who was always there for him, and he missed the way she used to explain to him everything he ever asked her. Now with her busy schedule, a tutor had been engaged to supplement these needs.

His mother got back from work by 7.30 in the evening and then got busy with the dinner preparation in the kitchen.

She took repose by watching her favourite television serial that she had got used to, robbing him of the remaining time before his father's arrival around 9.00 in the night. Things had been mechanical for the past one year. Mornings had become hectic and nights saw everyone fagged out.

Earlier, Raman enjoyed going out and checking how many houses in the neighbourhood were affected by the black out in the colony. But he no longer enjoyed doing so as he had got used to the uninterrupted power supply.

The July night did exactly what perhaps the Selvam family had silently longed for since a long time–that elusive time, with each other. Ironically it was this very shortage of time that had prevented the busy parents to check if the battery of the inverter was charged or not.

After ages they were sitting together and discussing how each of them was going about with his or her work and, of course, Raman's school. They were sitting in the covered balcony on the back enjoying the light shower's pitter-pattering on the acrylic cover. They had not enjoyed such leisure hours in a long time.

As they were enjoying their time together, Raman's eyes fell on something flickering on the leaves of the jamun tree right in front of their balcony. The on and off flickering was mesmerising and Raman was prompted to exclaim, "Appa (father), Amma, look at that jamun tree, it looks as beautiful as a Christmas tree does on Christmas Eve."

His parents were surprised and exchanged a quick glance. They realized their son was not aware about the flickering phenomenon which they knew well when they were his age.

Strange as it may have seemed to them but they did not take long to realize that even a nuclear family had its own price

to pay. They themselves had learnt so many things from their own parents and grandparents through stories and anecdotes. But times had changed.

Mr. Selvam began, "The flickering phenomenon is because of the fireflies which are very common during this warm, humid weather."

Raman had obviously not yet come across such a fascinating phenomenon in his science class or in any of the television programmes that he had watched. So he was really excited. He asked, "Appa, do you mean they produce light of their own in their bodies?"

Mr. Selvam affirmed this, saying, "Fireflies, also called 'lightning bugs', are bioluminescent."

Mrs. Selvam sat back and decided to enjoy the conversation between father and son, after all it happened only once in a blue moon.

Raman was listening to him intently and asked, "What does biolumi....mean?"

He could not pronounce the word but he was indeed curious enough to know more about it.

"Appa, could you please explain?"

"Yes, of course, son, organisms that produce light are called bioluminescent organisms. The phenomenon wherein light is produced by a chemical reaction in the organism is called bioluminescence."

"Wow!" said Raman, "That sounds interesting!"

Mr. Selvam said, "Yes, indeed it is. What actually happens is that when a firefly breathes in, it takes in oxygen that creates a chemical reaction in the lower abdominal region. This reaction generates the light that shines through the skeleton of the firefly."

"I know what a chemical reaction is," Raman said excitedly, "it is a process in which one or more substances interact and metamorphose into another. We learnt about it when we studied photosynthesis. What are the substances involved, Appa?" inquired Raman.

"Well, the chemical called luciferin in the lower abdomen of the firefly reacts with oxygen and produces light.

There is also a belief that if you happen to catch a firefly without causing any harm to it you can get a wish of yours fulfilled. Make sure to release it soon after you wish for something," concluded Mr. Selvam.

Just then the lights turned up.

Mr. Selvam got up from his chair and remarked, "Mind you, they do not need an inverter to keep themselves, glowing."

They had a hearty laugh and were going in when Raman spotted something flashy on the railing of his balcony. He let both his parents go in and went to take a close look at the thing

flashing on and off.

Raman's heart was pounding; he now knew what it was and immediately rushed into the kitchen and fetched an empty jam bottle and also a handkerchief from his wardrobe.

He carefully placed the glass bottle on the firefly seated on the railing and waited for it to go further into it; once it did, he promptly covered it with his handkerchief. He then mumbled something in his heart, looked at it endearingly and wasted no time in releasing it out of the jar.

Raman felt light at heart as he prepared to go to bed.

A few months later Mr. Selvam got an excellent job offer with a considerable hike in salary alongwith other perks. He wasted no time in grabbing it. It was left to Mrs. Selvam's discretion if she wanted to continue with her job. And you guessed it right, she happily decided to quit her job!

Raman's joy knew no bounds. It was the purity of his innocent heart that longed for a wish that eventually got fulfilled.⌘

WAIT...

Prerna (16)
Illustration: Sanjay Sarkar

Wait...and let me hold your hand,
Wait and let me take your hand,
Lead me to a place of love,
A place carved of dreams.

Wait...and let me hold your hand,
Take me to a fairyland,
You'll be the prince and I'll be your maid,
And the magic of love will prevail.

Wait...and let me hold your hand,
Escort me away from this cruel world,
This world which doesn't understand love,
To a world which is peaceful as a dove.

Wait...and let me hold your hand,
Take me to the field of trust,
A place with no misunderstandings,
So that there are no suspicions.

Wait...and let me hold your hand,
Wait and let me take your hand,
Lead me to a place of love,
Where I will be you and you'll be me.

Tomorrow's World

Time and Tide

Shikha Ruhil (12)
Illustration: Saurabh Pandey

Time and tide wait for none,
It runs like Harbhajan.
One day I woke up,
And had a tea cup.
I was astonished to know
That the tea was served
By the robot, Asimo.
Then I went to school,
The day was really cool.
Robots were our teachers.
Teaching us on laptops and computers.
But, unfortunately there was no one,
To share our feelings and emotions.
Then, suddenly, the alarm bell rang,
After seeing the time
I got up with a bang.
Due to the dream I missed my school.
That dream often comes in my sleep,
To tell the world, in future I will
Be really something different.

My Dream Car

Siddharth Jain (11)

My dream car, my dream car,
It would take me very far.
It would run very, very fast
And would leave F1 cars at the last.
It would fly up in the air,
And also have automatic gear.
It would punish the bad men
And help the innocent if it can.
It would be very, very big,
And would be able to dig.
It would have a petrol-making machine,
And a large petrol tank.
Which would always help me in running
Races and place me on top of the rank.

Nest of Nails

Toshi Goswami
Illustrations: Saurabh Pandey

"MOTHER, LOOK at the moon," Druv shrieked, "it is mimicking the orange sun!"

"Have you again missed the headlines—'Orange Moon in 40 years in the November Sky'? Didn't you read about it in the newspaper that the event is happening after a gap of four decades?"

"A full moon does change one's behaviour," smiled Druv darting towards his room. He was in a hurry to get back to Google search. "Who reads the paper these days?" he chuckled.

He sat at his computer and surfed for: 'Orange Moon in the November Sky...' and immediately a world of information opened up on the subject.

The moon is said to cast a major influence on several ancient cultures like Greek, Egypt, India, etc., where people worship the moon. The moon is said to have an impact not only on science but even on spirituality, mythology, astrology and mysticism, It has found frequent references in Romantic literature too. Dhruv had really discovered a lot of information on the moon—also about its gravitational pull which is responsible for high tide and the resultant impact on the sea animals.

That night, miles away, very deep in a forest a panther lay in hiding. The presence of the orange moon had perplexed him too though his glassy eyes were transfixed on something more horrific.

The king of the jungle lay listlessly before him. He was unable to wave away even a fly! This death of a king paralysed him. The only other witness to this scene was his friend and guide, Jacky the Jackal. He was also best known as the lion's provider. The chilling moment and the presence of the orange moon glued them together like comrades in fear.

As the shock turned into realization, the slyest of the five big cats appeared to be in a trance. The most agile,

graceful, strong and dreaded of all cats was confused. What he had seen and witnessed had exhausted him completely. Horror reflected in his glassy eyes—eyes which had just seen the king of the jungle die!

After a prolonged lull and the orange moon still smiling down at him, the panther was stirred, inspired and locked in. He sat in silence with head and heart strewn together, as if meditating. But actually he was scheming. With his lust for power and devilish determination, he was deeply engrossed in making a nest of nails. No one could chill his guts! With stars in his eyes, the panther looked into the eyes of his friend, Jacky.

Wings of greed have the same colour; it takes one to recognize another. Their logic was simple—it's the scheme from heaven. They were but merely puppets in the hands of the Almighty. They were destined to take over.

They now moved in unison, as they pushed the dead lion into the swift river. With great joy and relief they saw the mighty body being swallowed by the roaring river.

Triumphantly they then turned towards the golden gates of their empire. Could the transfer be that easy? They both beamed with ultimate satisfaction and then sighed.

Walking still in unison, like Siamese twins, Jacky tickled the new king panther's ego as he mockingly warned, "Beware of your spots, for sure you will be spotted."

The newly-turned king, the panther shot back, "I am no less than a lion. I just need a thicker mane and a thicker tail. And you, my friend, will chew my spots up." The king panther further said, "You will be my bodyguard and friend as ever."

Jacky, sharp as nails, was not flattered as he retorted, "How will you roar?"

"You will spread the rumour that the king is nursing a bad throat," was his crisp growl.

For once the very clever Jack of all trades was non-plussed. Thinking quickly, the Jackal reeled out his demand, "You will have to give me absolute power and protection."

The king panther had no choice and hesitantly he replied, "Yes, yes, my friend and comrade, you will be the sole sharer of my power and domain. Let us now hurry, before the jungle wakes up."

The other witness, the orange moon, was already fading out.

Together they marched to the lion's den. Well-assured, the king panther now lay down his demands, "Clean the den and destroy the proof. The king cannot be taken for granted even by his friend. Now there is no turning back. We can't make any mistake."

"Let me eat your spots first," Jacky shot back with equal authority.

The king panther soon realized that Jacky has got the devil's might as he went for the panther's spots like a rabbit goes for cabbage. When he reached the neck the king panther almost missed a heartbeat.

"Thank God! The mission is over," sighed the new king.

The sun emerged in the horizon unaware of the orange moon. When told the Sun God laughed, "Mimicking is the best form of flattery," he said caressing his ever-sleeping sepoys—the mountains—and taking control of the sky, flaming it red. Seeing the first ray of light, the birds broke into a melodious welcome song.

The animal world slept on peacefully. Panther the king, exhausted by his own schemes, too slept on dead to the world. He had strange dreams, dreams where his words were the command of the day. That he roared like a lion, the baboons fell from the trees at his mere sight, and the bulbuls twittered away non-stop when they saw him. The fear of personification evaporated, the panther's world had turned into a golden mist of happiness. He romped like a king. Lesser animals were in awe and gave way to him like half-bent courtiers. Oh, what a dream! Licking his whiskers in his sleep he stretched his legs.

As the sun set on the western ridges, the edges of the ridges started glowing.

Shortly the trees had stars in their curls; the backdrop was getting ready to welcome the new king.

King panther got up with the agility true to his trait but promptly halted in his tracks and rolled leisurely on to his side. Then, with regal movements, the new king emerged with ease and calm—the sign of a royal highness.

Sighting him the jackal, his friend, fainted. But the black spots were still churning his stomach, a reminder of a most eventful night. With a confident smile he then walked up like a puffed-up general to his seat of command.

The season of Spring went by and two friends became each other's alter-ego. Their dependency to keep the deception became their second nature, so much so that they no longer feared of being spotted. In this day and age it is difficult to dream of an utopia, but they not only had their utopia, but were the king and commander-in-chief of their utopia.

One day, as the evening drew closer, the aroma of night jasmine turned the king panther's head heavy with sleep. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. But not today. Telling a lie is one thing but living it is another.

The evening sky spread its golden sheen, lighting up the trees into shimmering silver. The berries appeared like rubies. The breeze unburdened the trees as they shed their leaves, all shades of coral, covering the ground like any landscape painter's delight. There was more activity in the jungle than the normal buzz.

Jacky sensed king panther's nervousness. "It is full moon, don't you remember? Time to rejoice, to love and make merry. Today one gets loony," he said, comforting his worried mind.

The two partners in sin and comrades of fear had forgotten the art of living with nature, having lost their natural instincts. Deception was the only flag they now hurled at the world. That had become their daily motto, their struggle and mirage.

Convinced, king panther adorned the highest seat along with his friend, Jacky, the Jack of all trades.

After soaking in the moonlit jungle the king panther as if reminiscing said, "I now recollect few such nights which were wonderfully enchanting till the year I got beaten by my own brother, the black one, the black sheep of the family. Why, my own mother had to give birth to my enemy!" snarled the king panther.

"Now, now, be calm. You are the king. These low feelings do not suit you. Animosity and jealousy are born out of inferiority; competing with hatred to kill is not the trait of a king. The king is generous, compassionate, forgiving and fair and that is why he is royal," emphasized Jacky as he saw the imposter king slipping.

"Do not cajole me, my own mother produced one," the sly cat howled like an injured animal.

"They are extinct, the WWF survey claims that," Jacky proclaimed emphatically.

The river was gurgling joyously, hugging the entire boulder, like liquid silver mercury flowing and humming the love song of nature. The whole jungle seemed to be in a festive mood. The birds were twittering and gliding in the sky. The petals seemed laminated as moonlit breeze blew over them and escaped through its hallowed trunks.

All of a sudden there was pin-drop silence. The birds stopped twittering, the monkeys went silent, the snakes coiled back into their pits. The antelopes took a leap for life, and the elephants trumpeted.

Against the moonlight a black silhouette moved with an assured cat-like walk. The flowing parts of the phantom silenced all thoughts. As if a scorpion had stung them all.

The black panther gracefully sat on the opposite hill—a vantage position as if calling it 'check mate'. Only

the full moon moved, gliding so low. The moon then slithered away teasingly behind the hill, smoking the area black. Everything and everyone lost their reflected glory, even the black panther.

Gingerly, the round pot of silver moved up on top of the hill, spotlighting the beauty of the black panther. The black panther, set against the silvery moon, looked magnificent and was now walking down majestically with elegance par excellence towards the river.

Coming close to the river he looked up towards the moon shining on the imposter, the king panther.

The king panther froze, felt spotted and exposed. 'Could he doubt my authority or my impersonification or both?' he feared. Today I have earned the wages of my sins, 'Oh God!' he said and swallowed the rest of his prayers.

The black beauty had bent down only to drink water. After a while, with utter grace and supreme indifference, it re-glided into the river.

Meanwhile the king panther was overpowered by fear, jealousy, revenge and a desire to kill. He dived into the river, chasing his brother, his imagined enemy.

Quick-witted Jacky apprehended that it was all over. His king had fallen! Hiding behind the tree he saw the last of his king panther's death in the water. After all, it was a nest of nails!

Jacky ran and ran for miles, far away from his reputation of being the second-in-command of an imposter king. It could take a lifetime to erase one year of disgrace and lie, after all, it was a nest of nails...⌘

The Worst Experience

Nishikant Nayak
Illustrations: Sanjay Sarkar

I WAS in an elated mood today. Even my worst enemies seemed not as bad as they were. I was on top of the world and everyone was taken aback by the change in my countenance. My teachers too were confused and pleasantly surprised to see a more intelligent side of me. The reason was the recent olympiad competition that I had won.

Soon I, a street smart but poor and ordinary property dealer's son, would be flying to Singapore as part of my scholarship.

I returned home with a mixed emotion of joy and pride. Joy, because I would finally be able to rid my family of poverty, and pride, for rising up to my father's expectations and bringing him a good name.

I hopped through the unending line of Mumbai's backyards, more commonly known as EWPs, finally reaching my own house—a white, but soot-blackened house which was home more to fungi and vermin than humans. I hopped ecstatically through the algae-covered passageway, nearly squelching a slug underneath my torn canvas shoes, hardly minding the bitter-sweet smell of the vines that covered our building.

I reached our flat which, in comparison to others, was like stepping into heaven after an ordeal in hell, and rang the bell. As usual mom opened the door. But I smelt a different air in the environment. It was not the same be-happy-with-what-you-have reassuring attitude. There was a distinct sadness in the house. I wondered what more God wanted from us? Was he not tired of testing us. I slunk quietly into my bedroom, curious to know my mom's misery. The moment I stepped into my father's bedroom (which all this while my mom had been trying desperately to stop me from going in by offering an unexpectedly delightful lunch and talking sweetly) to tell him about what happenend at school,

a dreadful shock awaited me.

Dad was lying haphazardly on the bed, gently moaning and clutching his chest. I was stunned beyond belief and rushed blindly to the fragile form on the cot. My paternal grandfather was standing near my dad, his face revealing a mixed expression of fatherly agony and concern.

My mom, who now had failed in her covert mission of preventing me from entering the room of sadness, couldn't stand the sight and rushed out, unable to control the tears welling up in her eyes. A loud bang that echoed from the drawing room was enough to tell me where my mom had taken off to.

I was personally agonized to see my father in such a state. I asked my grandfather, what was wrong with him.

He gravely replied that since my father was a heart patient, he was right now in a very critical state owing an abnormal clotting in the heart's chambers. The ambulance would be shortly arriving to take him to a hospital. My grandfather further informed me that Dad would be undergoing a surgery in two days.

At this point my senses went numb. My feet felt like they were not on solid ground but hovering a few feet above it. My whole body felt like a balloon ready to burst. I remained in this seemingly partial coma watching my father breathing heavily, my grandmother comforting my mom while in the background I could hear sad music being played. I was so upset.

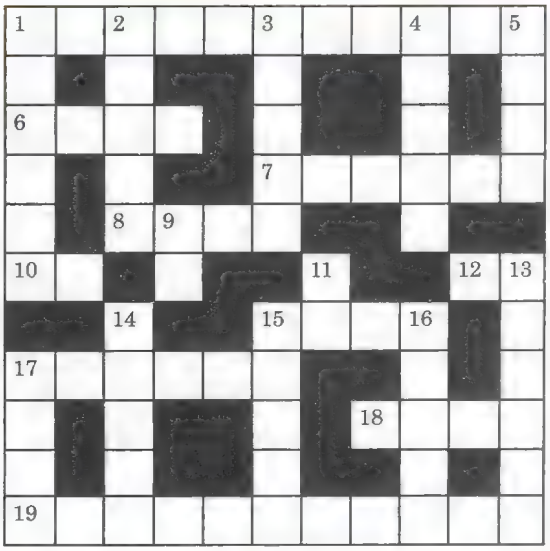
I remained in this motionless state for many minutes. And then I heard the loud siren of the ambulance from the street below.

In a flash men dressed in white arrived with a stretcher and took away my groaning father. I watched as the ambulance disappeared in the horizon.⌘

WORD HUNT

Geeta Menon

Fill in this crossword and send it to us on or before **April 25, 2012.** THREE all-correct entries will get attractive prizes. So what are you waiting for? Get cracking! (Xerox and faxed entries will not be considered.) Turn to page 44 for the names of Three prizewinners of Word Hunt (February 2012). Look out for prizewinners of Word Hunt (March 2012) in the next issue. Keep your fingers crossed till then!



Across

1. The scientific study of birds (11)
6. My father was put on a _____ the moment he reached the hospital. (4)
7. The fresh air brought _____ to her cheeks. (6)
8. He was given a new cabin with his name _____ed on the nameplate outside the door. (4)
10. She left in a huff, then ____ and behold! she returned. (2)
12. Transfer Certificate, abbreviation (2)
15. The lawyer couple were put behind the _____ for murdering their servant. (4)
17. Rick Riordan is the _____ who created the fictional character Percy Jackson. (6)
18. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is the independent regulator of the telecommunications business in India, abbreviation (4)
19. The art of producing beautiful handwriting with a special pen or brush (11)

Down

1. The rescued women spoke fearlessly about their _____ to the police. (6)
2. Lacking experience of life (5)
3. To come out of an egg (5)
4. A round vegetable with many layers inside each other with a strong smell and flavour (5)
5. I worked with Child Relief and You for over a _____. (4)
9. Tuberculosis, abbreviation (2)
11. Chartered Accountant, abbreviation (2)
13. A hole in the tooth (6)
14. An island made of coral and shaped like a ring with a lake of sea water in the middle (5)
15. The teacher told the students to _____ one old dress each to donate to an orphanage. (5)
16. She wrote the list on a _____ of paper. (5)
17. All India Congress Committee, abbreviation (4)

(PLEASE FILL IN CAPITAL LETTERS. MAKE SURE YOU WRITE THE COMPLETE ADDRESS OF BOTH YOUR RESIDENCE AND SCHOOL TO ENABLE US TO SEND YOUR PRIZES.)

NAME.....AGE.....BOY/GIRL.....CLASS.....

ADDRESS.....

.....TEL.....

SCHOOL.....

WORD HUNT (February 2012) Results

The prizewinners are:

1. Sukrat Mittal
   DAV Public School
   Kotkapura
   Punjab
2. S. Vidhyaalakshmi
   Cluny MHSS School
   Ramakrishna Road
   Salem
3. Abhishrey Gupta
   Lancer's Convent
   Prashant Vihar, Rohini
   Delhi

E	N	E	R	G	Y	■	M	E	R	E
M	■	V	■	■	■	■	E	■	■	R
B	R	E	A	K	■	A	N	■	■	R
A	■	R	■	■	A	■	■	F	B	■
S	O	Y	A	■	D	■	■	L	■	B
S	■	D	■	T	E	A	■	I	■	A
Y	■	A	■	■	P	■	S	P	O	T
■	M	Y	■	■	T	■	■	P	■	T
A	■	■	P	T	■	E	L	A	T	E
R	■	■	I	■	■	■	■	N	■	R
T	O	I	L	■	P	O	E	T	R	Y

JUNIOR WORD HUNT

Here are the prizewinners!

1st

Afraaz Singh
Apeejay School
Model Town
Jalandhar

2nd

Naman Rai Bajaj
Lancer's Convent
Prashant Vihar
Rohini, Delhi

3rd

Aditya Kanathila
St. Paul's English
School
Bangalore

ANSWERS (February 2012)

T	A	G	O	R	E	■	B	■
R	■	I	■	E	■	■	H	■
U	■	F	E	D	■	B	U	S
M	E	T	■	■	■	■	■	P
P	■	S	H	I	R	T	■	O
E	■	■	■	■	■	H	O	T
T	O	Y	■	A	T	E	■	T
■	F	■	■	I	■	R	■	E
■	F	■	F	R	I	E	N	D

A Walk In the Park

Hari Verma
Illustration: Sanjay Sarkar

It was not every now and then
That I took a walk in the park.
But I always did this when
My whole life seemed to go dark.

Every walk I took in the park,
Every time I looked beside the palms,
I could see an old man
Begging for alms.

He just squatted there,
Never did he move an inch.
Mostly his palms being bare,
Waiting for the feel of a coin's cold touch.

He seemed quite strong and sturdy
I wondered why he begged for alms,
Because just in front of him was a shop
With a signboard that stated:
"Help Wanted"

Maybe it was just because
He was lazy, I thought.
And left it in my mind, unthought.

Some days later, in a happy mood,
I went to my child's school.
I saw that man precariously
Trying to cross the road.
And them I realized that he was a blind.

I was full of remorse,
And wondered why
I thought so lowly of him,
And after that I told my child
The very same day
That appearances can be deceptive.

A strange darkness seemed to grip me.
Maybe I felt it strange because I had
Never before accused someone of
Something he was not responsible for.

That night I went for a walk
In the same park again,
And looked at the old man
With utmost sympathetic pain.

Focus

Polio-Free India—A Soon-To-Be Reality

At a two-day (February 24-25) Polio Summit 2012 in New Delhi, it was announced that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has taken India's name off the list of polio-endemic countries leaving now only three countries in the list—Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan. The status was granted to India on the basis of not a single case of polio having been reported for over a year. India truly has come a long way—from 150,000 cases in 1985 to not a single new case in 2011—a remarkable achivement indeed! Now that India has been removed from the list of polio-endemic countries, effort needs to re-inforced to remain polio-free for the next two years and achieve a polio-free status. Lauding the hard work put in by over 23 lakh volunteers who ventured into even the remotest areas to repeatedly vaccinate children below five years, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said, "...team work pays."

Geeta Menon **Layout: Subir Roy**

EVERY FEW months bright yellow camps spring up in every nook and corner of the country, including railway stations and bus depots. Children below the age of five happily throng these camps as they get gifts like whistles, caps, sweets, stickers, and so on. These are no ordinary camps—they are Pulse Polio Immunisation Camps—where all children from 0-5 years are vaccinated periodically, at the same time, against the dreaded polio virus.

One by one young children are administered two drops of the polio vaccine by volunteers wearing bright yellow shirts. Then the children are made to hold out their hands so that their one finger can be painted with the indelible ink. This is to ensure no child is left out.

Established by the Government of India in 1995-96, following the Polio Eradication Initiative of the World Health Organization (1988), Pulse Polio Immunisation Campaign deals with ways to fight poliomyelitis through a large-scale immunisation programme in collaboration with various international institutions, state governments and Non-Governmental Organisations which aimed at 100% coverage.

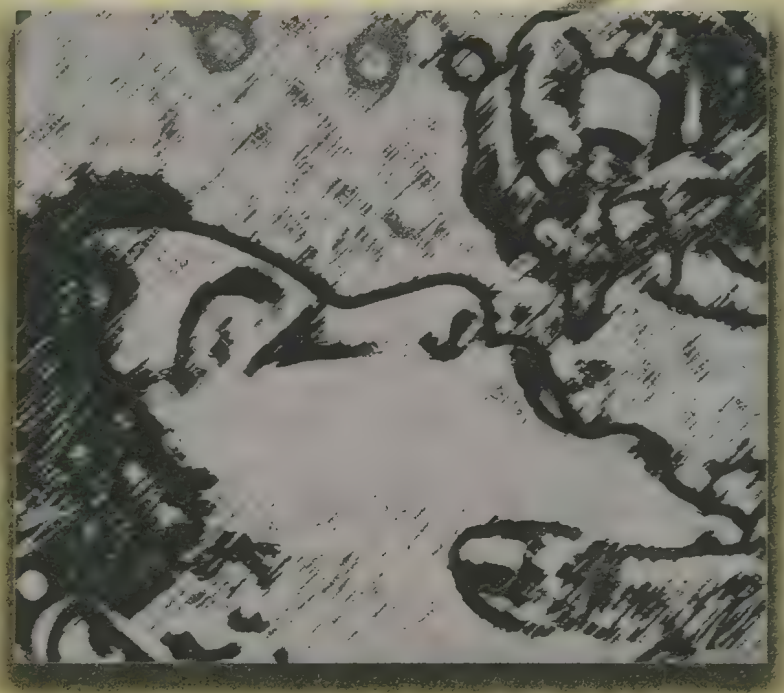
Poliomyelitis has existed as long as human society, but the same became a major public health issue in late Victorian times with major epidemics in Europe and the United States.

Poliomyelitis is a highly infectious viral disease which affects the central nervous system. It causes spinal and respiratory paralysis. It is passed from one person to the other via contaminated faeces. The early symptoms of poliomyelitis include fever, headache, tiredness and stiffness in the neck. In some cases it leads to irreversible paralysis, usually in the legs. Poliomyelitis becomes fatal when the chest muscles become paralysed and the patient is unable to breathe.

While there is no cure for polio, it can definitely be prevented. There are two types of polio vaccine—oral vaccine and injected vaccine—both provide life-long protection.

The first polio vaccine which was developed by Jonas Salk in 1955 consisted of an injected dose of inactivated (dead) polio virus, whereas the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV), developed by Albert Sabin in 1957 used attenuated (weakened) polio virus widely used in developing countries.

The battle against polio is far from over. Since Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria are still in the polio-endemic list, there is every possibility of the polio virus getting reintroduced into India from these countries.



Hence continued efforts and organized action is the need of the hour. If we can keep the disease away from the world for three years only then can we proudly declare that India has been successful in eliminating the disease completely ⌘

The Month That Was

Geeta Menon

NATIONAL

• Feb. 1: The Delhi-based intelligence and criminal investigation unit of the Income-Tax Department conducts searches at nearly 20 places in different parts of the Capital and Uttar Pradesh in connection with suspected tax evasion by companies associated with liquor baron and multiplex businessman Gurdeep Singh 'Ponty' Chadha and unearth 200 crores of Indian currency.

• Feb. 2: Declaring the allocation of 2G Spectrum by the Congress-led UPA government 'illegal' and an example of the arbitrary exercise of power, the Supreme Court cancelled all 122 telecom licenses allotted on or after January 10, 2008 to 11 companies during the tenure of the former telecom minister A. Raja.

• Feb. 3: The Supreme Court takes the Union government to task over the issue of age of the Chief of the Army Staff, General. V.K. Singh, saying the government decision-making process went against the principles of natural justice and the Constitution.

• Feb. 4: A special court dismisses Janata Party President Subramanian Swamy's prayer for summoning Union Minister P. Chidambaram as an accused for allegedly conspiring with the then Telecom Minister A. Raja, in the 2G spectrum issue.

• Feb. 6: The United Progressive Alliance government rules out withdrawal of its order debarring four space scientists from holding any government post or being on any official committees for their role in the Antrix-Devas Multimedia deal.

• Feb. 8: Laxman Savadi, J. Krishna Palemar and C.C. Patil—three ministers of the Karnataka Government tender their resignation voluntarily after they were found watching objectionable content on the mobile in the Assembly.

• The BJP government in Karnataka suffers another setback with Advocate-General B.V. Acharya preferring to resign from his post to giving in to 'pressure' from the State government to quit as Special Public Prosecutor in the disproportionate assets case against Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha.

• Feb. 9: The Special Investigation Team probing Zakia Jafri's complaint frees Chief Minister Narendra Modi of all charges in the 2002 Gujarat pogrom against Muslims.

• A 39-year-old school teacher loses her life when one of her students aged 15 stabs her as he was upset at being repeatedly reprimanded by her for not doing well in studies.

• Feb. 10: In a setback to General V.K. Singh, the Supreme Court refused to intervene in his plea pointing out that the Army Chief, who accepted the government's decision in determining his date of birth as May 10, 1950, on three occasions, could not go back on his commitment.

• Feb. 13: Urdu poet and Jnanpith Award recipient Akhlaq Mohammad Khan, popularly known as Shahryar (76) passes away in Aligarh.

• A powerful blast rips through the car of the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi injuring the diplomat seriously.

• Feb. 14: Air India will no longer enjoy the exclusive privilege over all bilateral air traffic rights with foreign countries as the government decides to allow all Indian carriers to use these rights.

• Feb. 15: Two Indian fishermen, mistaken as pirates, were shot dead by the security crew of cargo vessel Enrica Lexie in the sea zone off Ambalapuzha, Kerala.

• Feb. 16: The 10,000-crore central funds scam of The Rural Health Scheme in Uttar Pradesh turns murkier with another health official—the fifth victim in the past one year—found murdered at his home.

• The Indian Navy lashes out at the Italian oil tanker, Enrica Lexie, for flouting the laid-down counter-piracy measures which resulted in the ship's armed guards gunning down two Indian fishermen.

• Feb. 17: The Centre's ambitious plan to create a National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC) runs into rough weather with several non-congress Chief Ministers attacking the move on the ground that it infringes upon the powers and rights of State Governments.

• In Mumbai Shiv Sena-BJP Republican Party of India (RPI) coalition wins the municipal corporation election.

• Feb. 18: The CBI announces a reward of Rs. 10 lakh for information on absconding senior police officer A.K. Jain wanted in connection with the much-talked about Dara Singh encounter case.

• Feb. 19: After hectic negotiations, the Kerala police arrests two marines suspected to have fired the shots from an Italian oil tanker that killed two Indian fishermen off Kerala on February 15.

• The crucial fourth phase of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections record a turn out of 57.20% as polling passes off peacefully.

• At least 6 people killed and 40 injured in a stampede near the Bhavnath Shiva temple on the foothills of the Girnar hills in Gujarat.

• Feb. 20: Even as the government

rules out a bail out package for the cash-strapped Kingfisher Airlines, owned by liquor baron, Vijay Mallya, the private carrier blames the Income-tax authorities for the widespread cancellation of flights.

• Feb. 21: The Supreme Court expresses its displeasure at the Gujarat Government filing a 'spurious' criminal case against social activist Teesta Setalvad for her alleged role in exhuming the bodies of post-Godhra riot victims in 2006 at Pandarwada, and extended the stay of the proceedings against her pending before a lower court.

• Feb. 22: New Delhi resists pressure from Rome for a 'midway formula', telling the visiting Deputy Foreign Minister that the issue arising out of the killing of two Indian fishermen by Italian marines will now be decided by court.

• The Kingfisher Airlines file a fresh flight schedule with the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) bringing down its operations to about 170 daily flights with 28 functional aircraft.

• A massive avalanche in Jammu and Kashmir kills 17 soldiers.

• Feb. 24: Eminent aerospace scientist Roddam Narasimha resigns as a member of the Space Commission in protest against the blacklisting of scientists involved in the controversial spectrum deal between the ISRO and Bangalore-based Devas Multimedia Private Limited.

• Feb. 25: India, which has been polio-free for over a year now, taken off the list of polio-endemic countries by the World Health Organisation.

• Feb. 26: A major fire, first of the kind in 45 years, rages across a large swathe of Nagarahole National Park in Mysore.

• Feb. 27: The Union Sports Ministry writes to the International Olympic Committee urging it to cancel the sponsorship of Dow Chemical for the London Olympics.

• Feb. 28: The CBI arrests architect Zahida Pervez for the sensational murder of RTI activist Shehla Masood.

• Feb. 29: Two suspected members of the Lashkar-e-Taiba who were planning to target crowded places in New Delhi arrested on the outskirts of the city.

INTERNATIONAL

• Feb. 1: British Prime Minister David Cameroon leads an angry attack on India for selecting French firm Dassault Rafale for a mega deal to supply fighter jets ignoring British claims as MPs and the media accused New Delhi of 'ingratitude', arguing that Britain gave millions of pounds in aid to India.

• Feb. 2: More than 100 people, most of them students, feared killed after a ship carrying 350 sank off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

• Feb. 4: Syrian forces unleash a barrage of mortars and artillery on the battered city of Hams for hours before dawn, sending terrified residents fleeing into basements and killing more than 200 people, in what appeared to be the bloodiest episode in a nearly 11-month-old uprising.

• Feb. 6: A 6.8 magnitude earthquake strikes off the coast of the central Philippines killing at least 44 people and causing widespread panic.

• Feb. 7: President of Maldives, Mohammad Nasheed resigns in the face of a mutiny by policemen that he said he did not want to put down by force, handing over the reins of power to his Vice-President, Dr. Waheed.

• Feb. 10: The Supreme Court of Pakistan rejects the appeal filed by Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raja Gilani and asks him to appear in court to face contempt charges.

• The Government sends a special envoy, M. Ganapathi, Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, to Male to assess the situation in Maldives.

• Feb. 11: After India does the ground work of talking long hours to all parties about the conflict in the Maldives, the United States steps in to ensure that the new government sticks to its professed mandate of forming a unity government.

Whitney Elizabeth Houston (48), American recording artist, actress, producer, and model passes away on the eve of Grammy Awards in California.

• Feb. 12: Former Maldivian President Mohammad Nasheed displays admirable restraint as the new President Waheed Hassan finally gets his act together, names a new Cabinet and embarks on a Himalayan task of making the national unit government work.

• Feb. 13: Pakistan Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani formally charged with contempt of court for refusing to follow its order to reopen corruption cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

• Feb. 15: At a meeting between Defence Minister A.K. Antony and his Saudi counterpart Prince Salman Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud on Tuesday, the two sides expressed concern over the rise in piracy in the Indian Ocean region and agreed to "explore practical cooperation and an active role of the Royal Saudi Navy in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium construct."

• Feb. 17: Germany's President Christian Wulff quits in a scandal over favours he allegedly received before becoming Head of State, creating a major domestic distraction for Chancellor Angela Merkel as she grapples with Europe's debt crisis.

• Feb. 28: Barnavernet, Norway's powerful Child Welfare Service, announces that it has decided to award the custody of two Indian children taken into foster case last May to their uncle.

SPORTS

• Feb. 2: A bloodbath at a football stadium in the Egyptian city of Port Said triggers cascading protests against the ruling military authorities and the security forces, which are being accused of plotting the tragedy. At least 74 people were killed and hundreds wounded.

• Feb. 5: Despite a scintillating show by Dipika Pallikal, Egypt beat India 2-1 to clinch the SDAT-WSFU-21 World Cup Squash in Chennai.

• Feb. 14: The East Zone lifts the Duleep Trophy for the first time, the match ending with two-and-a half days to spare in Indore.

• Feb. 25: Indian women's hockey team fails to rise to the occasion in the final of the Olympic qualifier and lose to South Africa in New Delhi.

• Feb. 26: Indian men's hockey team qualifies for London Olympics when they defeat France 8-1 in the final in New Delhi.

Printed and published by Ravi Shankar on behalf of Children's Book Trust, Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110002
and printed at its Indraprastha Press, Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110002.

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